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A Case Study of Korean American Adolescents' Identity Construction through Literacy Practices on the Internet

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A Case Study of Korean American Adolescents' Identity Construction through Literacy Practices on the Internet

by

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Dedication

To my parents and Sunhee, Nayoung, and Jinsoo.

Acknowledgements

Looking back at the last 6 years' journey for my doctoral degree, I feel everything looks like a miraculous blessing. I am sure that I couldn't have finished this dissertation without the help of wonderful people who supported and encouraged me throughout my doctoral program. I am both fortunate and honored that Dr. Randy Bomer guided this dissertation. Whenever I came to his office with a problem, he had a special talent for easing my concerns. He always provided insightful answers to my questions and opened my eyes to the academic world. I sincerely thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Colin Harrison, Dr. Jim Hoffman, Dr. Melissa Mosley, Dr. Diane Schallert, and Dr. Jo Worthy. They provided thoughtful suggestions and encouragement throughout this project. They taught me about teaching and learning not only in the realm of theory, but also through their daily practice. I feel honored whenever I see their prominent names on my dissertation. Treavor, I can't thank you enough for your incredible help editing my dissertation draft.

노명완 선생님, 부족한 저를 학문의 길로 이끌어주시고 언제나 한결같이 격려해 주신 그 은혜 이 자리를 빌어 진심으로 감사의 말씀을 드립니다. 한국에서 저를 지도해 주신 여러 은사님들께도 감사를 드리며, 같은 길을 걷고 있는 많은 한국의 동료들에게도 감사의 말씀을 드립니다. 이름을 밝힐 순 없지만, 이 연구에 기꺼이 참여해 주고 연구가 잘 진행되도록 응원해 준 네 명의 친구들에게도 감사의 말을 전합니다.

A Case Study of Korean American Adolescents' Identity Construction through Literacy Practices on the Internet

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The purpose of this study was to provide a clearer understanding of current Korean American adolescents under the recognition that their stories are barely told in educational research. Based on the literature that has described identity as a core concept in understanding adolescence and literacy practice as a dominant tool for identity construction, this study focused on Korean American adolescents' identity construction through their self-directed Internet literacy practices. Four Korean American adolescents living in a mid-size city in the Southwest participated in this study for several months. Data sources included face-to-face interviews, literacy practice logs, participants' literacy products on the Internet, online chat logs, and emails. Collected data were analyzed based on the constant comparative method.

Results showed that these youth are active meaning makers with agency, that they constructed multiple, fluid identities within their sociocultural context, and utilized the Internet to stage these identities strategically. The result of this study implies a successful pedagogy needs to begin with careful consideration of each student's changeability and complexity by removing the labels imposed on them related to their ethnicity, race, gender, class, and so forth. This study also implies that literacy researchers' contribution, as messengers of adolescents' literacy practices outside of school, is critical for the a clearer understanding of adolescents. Finally, this study suggests that Korean American community take more interest in diverse voices among Korean American adolescents in the era of globalization.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of Korean American adolescents by exploring their identity construction through self-directed Internet literacy practices. The insights gleaned from this investigation are intended for educational researchers and administrators, classroom teachers, Korean American community leaders, and Korean American adolescents' parents, and others who are concerned with the Internet as a forum for learning communities and the identity work youth undergo within them.

Since 102 Koreans first set foot on Hawai'i as immigrant laborers in 1903 (Patterson, 2000; Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002), the number of Korean Americans has greatly increased. There were almost 1.33 million Korean Americans by 2006 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2006). Considering that the number was 798,849 in 1990, this indicates a 67% increase over 16 years. As the fifth-largest Asian ethnic group, following Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, and Vietnamese, Koreans are becoming one of the most rapidly increasing immigrant groups in the United States.

As the Korean American population increases, so does the number of Korean American students. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2007), there were almost 261,000 Korean Americans in the U.S. under age eighteen by 2005. However, despite the increasing number of Korean American students, their stories have barely been told in educational research. They are largely

"overshadowed by the … image of Asian American students and high levels of academic achievement among a portion of this group" (Shrake & Rhee, 2004, p. 603).

Contrary to the minority stereotype, recent studies have reported an increasing number of at-risk Korean American students. According to Lee (2007), for example, 27.6% of Korean American adolescents have experienced depressive symptoms, a much higher rate than U.S. adolescents as a whole (12.5%). Kim and Cain (2008) reported that Korean American adolescents had the poorest mental health among all Asian American adolescents. Suh and Satcher (2005) also reported that 9% of Asian students, including Korean Americans, dropped out of school and 22.9% were retained during the 1997-1998 school year in New York City.

Studies have indicated that their struggles result from limited English proficiency, low self-esteem caused by identity confusion, conflicts with parents, poor relationships with peers, role reversal in the family created by the children being more English proficient than their parents, limited access to social capital at home and in their ethnic communities, and ineffective learning environments in schools (Cho & Bae, 2005; Kim & Cain, 2008; Lew, 2004; Shrake & Rhee, 2004; Suh & Satcher, 2005).

Korean Americans experience higher intergenerational conflict between foreign-born parents and U.S.-born or U.S.-raised adolescents than Chinese and Japanese Americans (Yeh & Inose, 2002). This high rate is, in part, related to traditional Korean Confucian culture and authoritarian parenting styles, which stress

the educational success, unconditional respect to parents and elders, family honor, and unidirectional communication from parent to child (Kim & Cain, 2008).

Limited access to social capital is another obstacle. The NCES (2007) reported that 11.4 % of Korean American families with children under eighteen were living in poverty by 2005. Korean American immigrants are heavily concentrated in labor-intensive small businesses that depend mainly on low-income customers (Min, 2006). While unskilled jobs in a manufacturing-based economy enhanced the upward mobility of immigrants at the turn of the last century, this niche has been lost in the U.S. because of the ascendance of a knowledge-based economy. This and other changes in the U.S. economy have deepened the segmented assimilation among Korean American immigrants and increased the number of those who experience downward assimilation (Lew, 2004). Segmented assimilation, a term coined by Porte and Zhou (1993), describes three different settlement processes among U.S. immigrants:

> One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity. (p. 82)

Accordingly, children of low-income Korean American immigrants, isolated from neighborhoods without the protection of strong familial networks and social

capital, are likely to assimilate the cultures and norms of their poor minority peers and adopt an oppositional cultural frame of reference (Lew, 2004).

Living in the U.S. for the last six years as a graduate student from Korea, I have met hundreds of Korean American children in my neighborhood, at a Korean church as a Sunday school teacher, at a Korean school as a Korean language teacher, and through various Korean American community events. Among them, as a former high school Korean Language Arts teacher in Korea, I have had a special interest in adolescents and have listened to their stories about school life, friendship, family, their concerns, hopes, and so forth.

Through their stories, I understood that they were living in varied socioeconomic, historical, and cultural contexts with diverse struggles and concerns at school and at home. Because of this, I have felt an obligation to share their stories with educators and parents to promote a better understanding of Korean American adolescents. As Cho and Bae (2005) indicated, I think their stories are also helpful to Korean American community leaders and professionals who are "in need of empirical data on the lives of these adolescents in order to develop interventions and support programs" (p. 533).

Research Objectives

Focus on identity construction. As a way to portray their stories, this study aims to observe how Korean American adolescents construct their identities. Identity is a core concept in understanding humans because "it shapes or is an aspect of how

humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it" and "people can be understood by others in particular ways, and people act toward one another depending on such understandings and positioning" (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, pp. 228-229). Particularly in an age of uncertainty and complexity caused by globalization, increasing social mobility, and insecurity in personal relationships, identity issues become more critical (Buckingham, 2008).

Identity is an importance concept in understanding adolescence too. As the scope of lives widens throughout their junior high and high school years, adolescents experience a serious struggle in constructing identity (Reed, Schallert, Beth, & Woodruff, 2004; Vyas, 2004). Responding to its importance, adolescents' identity construction becomes one of the primary themes addressed in current research on adolescence (Serafini, Bean, & Readence, 2004). In particular, ethnic minority adolescents' identity construction matters because, in addition to ordinary developmental issues, they have to take on an additional burden to explore the values of both their host culture and their original culture (Sarroub, 2002; Shrake & Rhee, 2004).

Recent theories regard identity as inconsistent, multiple, or malleable. This is a move away from the understanding of identity as fixed and constant, which was associated with industrial and pre-industrial society (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Hagood, 2002a; Lewis & Del Valle, 2009). From the recent perspective, one's identity is considered as something to be endlessly twisted and molded by surrounding socioeconomic, ethnic, political, or cultural contexts (Bauman, 2004).

While acknowledging its changeability and multipleness, however, other scholars suggest the possibility of a core or anchored identity influenced and then solidified by a long history of socio-cultural practices (e.g, Gee, 2005; Merchant, 2005). Accordingly, for a better understanding of identity construction, this study aims to examine how contexts surrounding Korean American adolescents, such as family dynamics, historical factors, and socioeconomic status, have interacted with their identity construction both in synchronic and diachronic aspects.

Focus on literacy practices. In order to portray Korean American adolescents' identity construction, this study observes their literacy practices. Since the 1980s, literacy scholars have argued that literacy is always socially and historically situated and ideologically formed (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984). Within this theoretical framework, literacy practices have been regarded as an important way to construct identity within the relationships of race, gender, class, and so forth (Gee, 2000/2001; Ivanič, 1998; McCarthey & Moje, 2002).

While a considerable number of recent studies have empirically observed the construction of identity through different kinds of literacy practices with diverse ethnic groups in various sociocultural contexts, the case of Korean American adolescents has been, at this point, only rarely explored. Although several studies have dealt with identity construction as a way to describe Korean American adolescents (e.g., Kang & Lo, 2004; Lew, 2004; Shrake & Rhee, 2004; Suh & Satcher, 2005), these studies have so far ignored the observation of literacy practices

as a means to look into identity construction. They have relied instead on questionnaires or interviews. This study is meaningful as one of the first to observe Korean American adolescents' identity construction through their literacy practices.

Focus on the Internet. This study focuses on the Internet as offering sites of literacy practices and identity construction. The Internet has become an indispensable part of our lives. Online, people meet old friends, read news, and jump into political debates. As Thomas (2007) indicated, "There is no such dichotomy of online and offline, or virtual and real – the digital is so much intertwined into their lives and psyche that the one is entirely enmeshed with the other" (p. 163). This is an era of the co-existence of cyberspace and physical space and it seems "neither is about to go away" (Lankshear & Knoble, 2007, p. 9).

Just like any literacy practice in non-virtual contexts, literacy practices on the Internet are situated within specific cultural, historical, and economic contexts. While digital technology has provided interwoven networks all across the world for unlimited access, its users are still interacting with the Internet in relation to their sociocultural contexts in their physical world. Hawisher and Selfe (2000), along with scholars from around the world, including Hungary, Australia, Palau, Cuba, and the United States, show convincingly that the Internet conceived of as a culturally neutral literacy environment is a utopian and romanticized vision.

I, as a member of two different social network sites, *Cyworld* (a Korean community-based social network site) and *Facebook*, have personally experienced how closely sociocultural contexts are embedded in the literacy practices on these

sites. *Cyworld*'s unique relationship called '1-chon' can be an example of how Korean culture is embedded in deciding the level of openness of one's information and products in it. It originally refers to the relationship between parents and their children in Korea, and traditionally considered the closest human relationship (Jung, Youn, & McClung, 2007). The 1-chon buddy system makes people feel more intimate with other members by allowing only them access to personal information and products. In my experience, the "friend" system on *Facebook* does not resonate the same closeness of a 1-chon relationship.

The choice of the Internet is also important because it is a 'cyber-shelter' (Yi, 2007) or a 'safe space' (Vyas, 2004) where Korean American adolescents' voices can be easily expressed. In particular, the increasing number of social network sites and blogging services has made it easier for these adolescents to construct their inmost thoughts through the Internet in various ways. Moreover, considering identity construction as an ongoing process (Weber & Mitchell, 2008), the social network sites and blogs function as digital archives of their identity work in which their accumulated voices are archived.

I have maintained a 1-chon relationship with about ten Korean American adolescents and *Facebook* friendship with more than twenty. By maintaining a close rapport with them in this way, I have learned about their struggles and concerns, which are untold behind their products on their sites. I have also observed their critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) from their relating experiences of inequality as members of a minority ethnic group. My cyberspace interactions with them became

an important motivation for this study.

The choice of the Internet is also purposeful in that the digital divide between current adolescents and the older generation is much wider than the divide among the adolescents caused by differences in their socio-economic status. While most Korean American adolescents that I met spent at least one hour per day for the Internet, their parents barely shared Internet-related activities with their children. None of them shared their Internet activities with their teachers. Leander (2003) indicated that adolescents' out-of-school Internet literacy practice was an underexplored area in literacy research:

> While some interpretive works has examined online literacy practices within diverse school settings, relatively little work has closely documented the everyday online literacies in which many youths invest their time. (p. 393)

According to Prensky (2001), current adolescents are called *digital natives*, "Native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet (p. 1)" while calling the older generation digital immigrants: "Those of us who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology (pp. 1-2)." In spite of their effort to adapt to the digital world, however, digital immigrants "Always retain, to some degree, their accent, that is, their foot in the past (p. 2)".Considering this gap, this study provides a bird's eye-view of the adolescents' Internet literacy practices to the most important readers of this study: Classroom

teachers and Korean American adolescents' parents.

Finally, the Internet environment can provide more chances to participate in literacy practices for Korean American adolescents. In Internet spaces, they experience less pressure making meaning in Standard English and can draw on their proficiency in the Korean language or in multimodal expressions to transcend limitations of meaning-making in either language. Because the use of the Korean language among Korean American adolescents may be considered as a way to enact their ethnic identity, this study partially explores the relationship between the use of the Korean language and their identity construction.

Multimodality is an important concept in understanding texts produced on the Internet. On the Internet, a text no longer means just a sequence of alphabetic characters on a piece of paper. By including multiple semiotic systems such as written language, image, video, and sound in a text and then linking the multimodal text to numerous other multimodal texts all over the world, the Internet provides one of the most advanced communication environments. Adolescents can express who they are and what they want to say by writing, drawing, singing, taking pictures, dancing, videotaping, or mixing these media in various combinations and then publishing the results on the Internet. Such multimodal dimensions of composing are observed in this study as well.

Research Questions

Based on the research purpose, objectives, and theoretical backgrounds

mentioned above, this study aims to investigate the following two questions.

First, how have Korean American adolescents constructed their identity interacting with changing sociocultural environments? At the point that identity is central to human beings, this question aims to explain who Korean American students are becoming through exploration of their identity construction. Also, as one's identity construction is closely related to sociocultural environments and changes according to the ever-shifting sociocultural environments, this question intends to describe the interaction between Korean American adolescents' identity construction and sociocultural environments surrounding them in both synchronic aspect and diachronic aspects.

Second, how do Korean American adolescents utilize the Internet space in constructing their identity through literacy practices? Literacy practices are dominant ways to construct one's identity. And literacy practices are situated within specific contexts. This question aims to examine how Korean American adolescents understand the Internet as a literacy context and utilize its affordances in their identity construction.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter Two describes the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter Three provides an overview of the context and participants in this study and describes procedures I undertook for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four describes how the four participants of this

study had constructed identities through literacy practices on the Internet with examples of their Internet literacy practices and parts of my interviews with them. In Chapter Five, I draw upon the stories told in Chapter Four to analyze how the participants' identity construction can be understood as multiple, in flux, and in a constant state of becoming. Chapter Six explores how the four participants understood the Internet as a literacy space and utilized its affordance for their identity construction. Finally, Chapter Seven presents a summary of this study and provides implications for school practice, literacy researchers, and Korean American community.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter describes the study's theoretical framework. Specifically, the study is informed by research on identity, out-of-school literacy, multimodality, and adolescent literacy.

Non-Positivistic Research on Literacy

For a long time, literacy has been explained with terms such as written language, skill and strategy (cognition), and decontextualization. But since the 1980s, these notions of literacy have been fractured by disciplines oriented toward non-positivistic paradigms (Collins & Blot, 2003; Gee, 1996; Langer, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 2002; Schallert & Martin, 2003).

First, critical literacy theorists following the approaches of Foucault, the Frankfurt School, Freire, and Gramsci have focused on the relationship between power (dominance), knowledge (ideology), and discourse (literacy) and have emphasized the importance of literacy as the tool to produce oppositional ideologies against dominant ideologies (McLaren, 2003).

Also, scholars in the tradition of anthropology and sociolinguistics asserted the necessity of a new paradigm in literacy education with "diversity" as a keyword (Bloome, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2001). Through the period of industrialization, schools sought to remove individual diversity in favor standardized knowledge and language that would unify the culture (Apple, 1993). The deficit model, (Jensen,

1969; Riessman, 1962) identified any deviation from institutionalized standards as a deficit, and functioned as the dominant educational paradigm during this period (Erickson, 1986; New London Group, 1996).

Scholars in anthropology and sociolinguistics, however, provided a different perspective regarding diversity as "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990) by demonstrating numerous cases in which meaning is constructed successfully in diverse ways in a variety of social contexts. Constructs such as multiple literacies (Street, 1984; Cook-Gumperz & Keller-Cohen, 1993), communicative competence (Hymes, 1971, 1974), and out-of-school literacy (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Schultz, 2002) are highlighted in this tradition.

Psychologists have focused on two aspects of literacy since the late 1980s: Literacy as socially shared cognition, and the relationship between literacy development and elements other than cognition (Schallert & Martin, 2003). At first, ideas about socially shared cognition, based largely on Vygotsky and Bakhtin (Bruner, 1990; Gee, 2000; Langer, 1991; Scriber & Cole, 1981; Wertsch, 1991a) were propagated by scholars operating from the socioconstructivist paradigm. The basic tenet of these ideas is that " . . . human mental functioning is inherently situated in social interactional, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts" (Wertsch, 1991b, p. 86).

Psychologists' interest in elements other than cognition, such as agency, attitude, emotion, identity, and motivation is related to the recognition that the

acquisition of cognitive ability cannot guarantee voluntary and active engagement of literacy practices. Wertsch and Rupert (1993) provide an example of this recognition:

> When one reviews the recent empirical studies that have grown out of Vygotsky's claims about the social origins of individual mental functioning, it is striking that they have focused almost exclusively on cognition. One result of this focus is that intermental and intramental processes have been described and interpreted primarily in terms of strategies, scripts, and other theoretical constructs drawn from cognitive psychology. Few would deny that additional dimensions would be required to provide a complete account of intermental and intramental functioning. (p. 228)

Finally, scholars from the tradition of semiotics have criticized the tendency of logocentrism in literacy research and literacy education (e.g., Albers & Harste, 2007; Siegel, 2006; Wells, 2000) and have claimed "all meaning making is multimodal" (New London Group, 1996, p. 81). A more detailed discussion of multimodality will follow in this chapter.

Although I describe these approaches separately for the purpose of outlining a map of them, it is almost impossible to clarify the borders between each because they are closely interrelated. The case of the New London Group (1996) and their construct of "multiliteracies" is an example of interrelatedness among scholars from various disciplines and their collaboration for common concerns:

> The main areas of common or complementary concern included the pedagogical tension between immersion and explicit models of teaching; the challenge of cultural and linguistic diversity; the newly prominent modes and technologies of communication; and changing text usage in restructured workplaces. (p. 62)

This study is theoretically informed by the disciplines mentioned above. While I focus mainly on identity and literacy practices on the Internet, these theoretical constructs explicitly and implicitly support this research.

The Changing Communication Environment.

The appearance of digital technology and its ongoing development have expedited changes in the ecology of literacy (Barton, 1994; Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, & Pearson, 2004). The Internet environment is a good example of this change.

Description of current Internet environment. While almost 20 years have passed since the Internet became popular, the current shape of the Internet is quite different from that of its early days. O'Reilly (2005, as cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 16) explains the change using the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 frameworks and the examples in Figure 2.1.

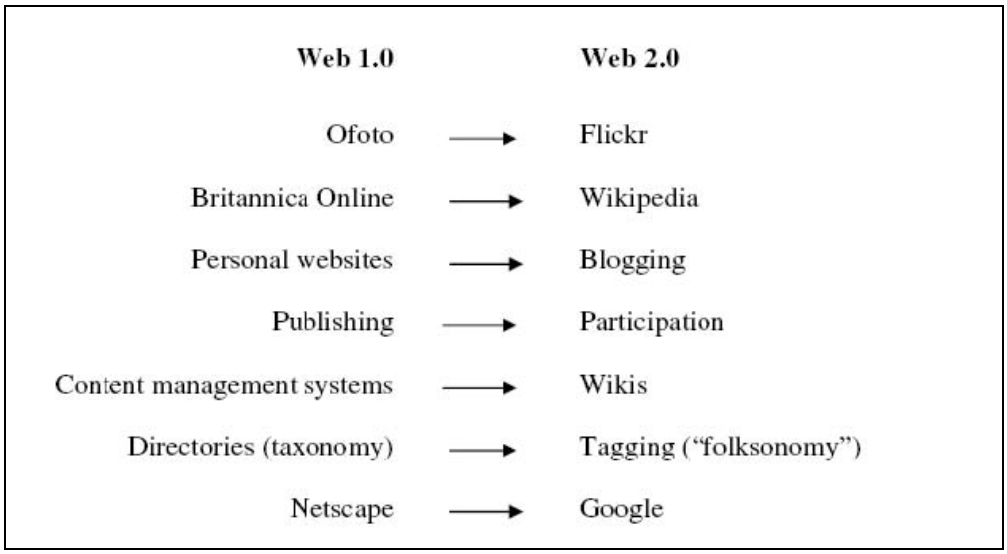

Figure 2.1. Examples of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Internet Applications and Approaches

The change has several aspects. First of all, there is the rise in popularity of *Wikipedia*, an online encyclopedia that can be edited by anyone. This can be highlighted as an example of a change in who produces discourse. While the older *Britannica Online* depends on a limited number of experts, and made a firm distinction between the producers and consumers of discourse, *Wikipedia* blurs this distinction and provides the anonymous masses with agency to participate in making their own discourse.

The shift from personal websites to blogging and from publishing to participation exemplifies how the process of producing and sharing discourse has changed. While personal websites under Web 1.0 represent one-way communication from a website to its visitors, Web 2.0 blogs represent two-way communication among networked bloggers. Bloggers are not passive recipients of web publications but active participants who give and receive viewpoints, provide new information,

and foster the Internet as an intellectual and a social resource. Further, *Google* represents a service platform that makes two-way communication easier and more convenient while *Netscape* is, in contrast, packaged software, a ready-made artifact or commodity of the Web 1.0 period.

The decline of *Ofoto* (*Kodak EasyShare Gallery* later, originally an online digital photo processing service) and the rise of *Flickr* (one of the largest platforms of online photo sharing community), and the general movement away from content management systems to wikis can be highlighted as points where the approach to knowledge management has changed from private management to collaborative management, from centralization to decentralization, from hierarchization to horizontal dispersion, and from physical space to cyberspace. A tagging system functions as an essential indexing tool in finding knowledge in this networked and decentralized cyberspace.

Although not mentioned in Figure 2.1, it is necessary to mention the appearance of *YouTube* in describing two other aspects of changing communication environment: Time shifting and space shifting (Trier, 2007). According to Trier, time shifting is defined as, "The capacity to engage with a text whenever the reader wishes rather than only when the text is broadcast or shown in some prescribed place and time" (p.411). Space shifting is defined as the capacity " . . . to view *YouTube* videos in a variety of physical settings, . . .pretty much wherever they happened to be that has an Internet connection''(p. 411). These aspects may be compared with DVD rental through *Netflix* website during the Web 1.0 period.

All these changes make it easier for average people from diverse historical and sociocultural backgrounds to participate in cyber communication. The characteristics of the Internet, such as unlimited accessibility, guaranteed anonymity, interactivity, and ease of prompt publication, permit normally silenced voices to be heard. The possibility of multiple ways of meaning making in cyberspace allows people to make meaning with less pressure from the culture's dominant language.

Appearance of social network sites. The appearance of social network is also a remarkable change on the Internet. According to Boyd and Ellison (2008), a social network site can be defined as:

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

Cyworld ((http://cyworld.nate.com), for example, is a social network site where Korean American adolescents' literacy practices can be observed. As a popular social network service among Koreans and even Korean American adolescents (Yi, 2005), it has more than 20 million members in Korea (Shim, 2007). Its users decorate their mini-homepage with various icons and songs purchased from the *Cyworld* online market, post posters of their favorite movies, photos of stars, and their own pictures or videos, quote their favorite poems and novels, and keep diaries. They also visit their friends' mini-homepages and leave responses to new postings.

When finding interesting content during their visits, they can copy and paste it to their own mini-homepages with their friends' permission. Sometimes they visit a star's mini-homepage to leave an affectionate message as well as communicate with other fans.

Existing studies indicate that social network sites are mostly used to maintain or solidify offline relationships rather than to meet new people. According to Choi (2006), for example, 85% of her study's respondents listed the maintenance and reinforcement of pre-existing social networks as their main motive for *Cyworld* use. Also, Boyd and Ellison (2008) indicate that some social network sites are designed with specific ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, political, or other identity-driven categories in mind. This shows the seamlessness (Thomas, 2006) between the real world and the cyber world. It also implies that the observation of social network sites can be a good way to observe identity construction because one's identity is constructed through the interaction with the people and texts surrounding him.

Multimodality. The Internet is the space where the most diverse multimodal literacy practice can be realized. As mentioned earlier, multimodality is closely related to semiotics (Kress, 2003). Semiotics is defined as an interdisciplinary field of studies that examines how meaning is made through signs of all kinds— pictures, gestures, music—not just words (Siegel, 2006). It is the study of signs and communicative symbols that take into consideration the evolution of meaningful sign systems within cultural contexts (Labbo & Kuhn, 1998).

The notion of mode is important in understanding multimodality. Mode refers

to " . . . the (full) semiotically articulated means of representation and communication" (Kress, 2000, p. 185) or " . . . forms within various sign systems that carry the meanings that a social collective recognizes and understands" (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 11). The New London Group (1996) suggests six modes in the meaning-making process: Linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal. So multimodality suggests that modes "rarely, if ever, occur alone" (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 2). Lemke (1998) provides a more concrete explanation of this:

> Those of us who are interested in the role of language as a tool for making meaning know that the meanings language helps us make are also made through its combination with a variety of other semiotic resources. Spoken language is accompanied by gesture, facial expression, body movement and posture, as well as the visible contexts of setting and activity. Written language is frequently accompanied by pictorial and graphical images, as well as itself being expressed through the meaningful visual resources of orthography and typography. The study of language in education is essentially incomplete without some analysis of how language combines with other semiotic systems. (p. 245)

Examination of the meaning making process is helpful in understanding the idea that "all meaning making is multimodal." Regarding this process, Albers and Harste (2007) identify four aspects that comprise a representation of meaning: Materiality, framing, design, and production. Materiality refers to "the materials

(paint, canvas, clay, wood, fabric, software, photos, etc.) used to represent meaning that a culture sanctions or supplies to its members" (p. 11-12). Framing refers to "the way in which elements of a visual composition operate together, are spaced, show dis/continuities in color, connect (or not) with each other, "move" on the canvas, and so on"(p. 12). Design, which is the most important parts of multimodal expression according to Albers and Harste, refers to "how people make use of the resources that are available to them at a particular moment to create their representation"(p. 13). The New London Group (1996) emphasizes, "We are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning." (p. 65) While design is the conceptual side of expression, production refers to "The creation and organization of the representation, the actual product of text (song, artwork, dance, play, photograph, webpage, and so on), as well as the technical skills (skills of hand, eye, ear, body) used when working with media in creating the text" (p. 14).

Theories of Identity

Identity has been explored in such diverse academic disciplines as anthropology, art, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Even though they have highlighted different aspects of identity at different approaches, one common point among them is that they regard identity as an important window to look into human social action (Deaux, 1993; Gee, 2000/2001). Identity has appeared in literacy

research since 1970s and recently become an important research topic (Lewis & Del Valle, 2009; McCarthey & Moje, 2002).

Social construction of identity. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006), since the term "identitie" first appeared in Oxford English Dictionary in 1570 meaning, "The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness" (OED, 2002). Identity was understood as personal, innate, stable, unified, and consistent, separate from external conditions such as linguistic, gendered, racial, cultural, and historical contexts (Hagood, 2002a).

This notion of identity has been challenged by the areas of microsociology and social psychology since 1970s (De Fina, 2006; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995) that emphasize social construction of identity. Regarding the question of "who I am," theorists in these two areas have developed different perspectives

Microsociology has developed Role Theory that explains the construction of identity under the recognition of given social roles to a person such as a teacher, a mother, or even a woman (Calhoun, 1994). In the meantime, social psychology has developed Self Categorization Theory that explains categorization, a basic human mental function for the processing of information in systematic and efficient ways, as the root of identity activation. According to this theory, making sense of the self and others, categorizing people in other words, is closely related to the construct of stereotyping and is related to the construct of identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1982). In Self Categorization Theory, self is defined within the relationship of

ingroup and outgroup. While the ingroup refers to the one to which one belongs, the outgroup is seen as outside and different from ingroup.

These two theories provide a useful way to explore identity construction from the third perspective by combining them: Exploration of how a person categorizes himself or herself as a member of a group, and exploration of the role that the person enacts while a member of the group (Stets & Burke, 2000).

While these two theories have contributed to the paradigm shift of identity theory from a personal to a social domain, they have been criticized for the treatment of identity as a pre-discursive and essentialist phenomenon (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Social structure and agency is related to this issue.

Social structure and agency. Identity is constructed within the struggle between social structure (or social constraint) and one's agency. Even though one's identity construction is forced by social structure surrounding him, he also has a sense of agency, "A resistance to identifications that others make" (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 232). Consequently one's identity construction is improvised within a dialogic frame (Holland et al, 1998) where discourse plays an important role. Holland and her colleagues' notion of improvisation from the story of "The Woman Who Climbed the House" in their book is an important construct to show the limitation of culturalist approach which looks for cultural logic from people's social behavior. This possibility of identity negotiation through dialogical performance results in the central role of discourse practices and, consequently, multiple identities as products.

Multiple identities. The construct of multiple identities suggests that a person has various, inconsistent, and even contradictory identities within and across different contexts (Gee, 2000/2001, 2005; McCarthey, 2001). Sometimes fragmented but still interrelated, a person's diverse identities constitute the richness and the dilemmas of his or her sense of self (Ivanič, 1998).

To differentiate new understandings of identity from traditional ones, some scholars have adopted different terms instead of retaining the word "identity." Subjectivity, for example, has been adopted by some scholars (e.g., Hagood, 2002a, 2002b; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002). However, Ivanič (1998) indicates that, "It is also a misleadingly singular word" (p. 11). McKay and Wong (1996) also indicate that subjectivity primarily connotes "inwardness," whereas identity encompasses both "inwardness" and "presentation." So, they favor identity, "Reserving subjectivity when there is a need to bring to the foreground the interiority of the self." (p. 606)

Gee's (2005) calls it "socially situated identity" with the following consideration:

> Some people dislike the term "situated identity" and prefer, instead, something like "(social) position" or "subjectivity" (they tend to reserve the term "identity" for a sense of self that is relatively continuous and "fixed" over time). I use the term "identity" (or to be specific, "socially situated identity") for the multiple identities we take on in different practices and contexts and would use the term "core" identity for whatever continuous and relatively (but only

relatively) "fixed" sense of self underlies our contextually shifting multiple identities. (p. 34)

Under the careful consideration of each term's merits and demerits, I use the term "multiple identities" when I need to emphasize the situatedness, plurality, fluidity, and complexity of identity in the context of this study. Anchored identity versus transient identity, which will be discussed below, also can be understood under the umbrella of multiple identities because their coexistence assumes that identity is not a constant and singular construct. But mostly the singular noun "identity" is used in order to signify one's concept of self abstractly.

Anchored identity and identity salience. Gee's construct of "core identity" mentioned above and in other places (2000/2001) is closely related to the constructs of "anchored identity" and "transient identity" (Merchant, 2005), as well as the construct of identity salience (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Merchant uses these terms to distinguish one's identities profoundly influenced by a long history of socio-cultural practices (such as gender or religion) from the others that are more easily made, remade and unmade (such as fandom). Rather than seeing these as binary divisions, he regards them " . . . more as poles on a continuum of multiple identity performance, imagining that interactions, contexts, and events are likely to make certain aspects of identity more or less salient at any given time" (p. 304).

While Merchant explains that the relative prominence of one identity over another as a matter of time and development, Stryker and Serpe (1982) provide a hierarchal understanding by defining identity salience as, "The probabilities each of

the identities have of being invoked across a variety of situations.' (p. 206). According to this notion, identities positioned higher in the salience hierarchy are tied more closely to a certain behavior (Hogg, Terry, & White). The choices or agency one takes in a given situation can make this issue more perceptible. For example, a Christian public school science teacher may position himself according to his identity salience when he teaches the theory of evolution.

McCarthey's understanding of identity is also related to the notion of anchored identity. She, in a conversation on identity with Moje (2002), shows a slightly different perspective from Moje on the constancy and continuousness of identity. While McCarthey emphasizes an isomorphic aspect of identity by saying, "We may be more than an incoherent mass of contradictions. Our individual histories, cultures, and languages provide us with a kind of gel that holds us together" (p. 230), Moje disagrees with McCarthey by saying, "Identity can be hybrid, it can be complex, and it can be fluid and shifting as a person moves from space to space and relationship to relationship" (p. 231). The existence of anchored or core identity is dealt with as an important question in exploring Korean American adolescents' identities in this study.

Korean Americans' Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is often understood as the degree to which individuals identify with their country of ancestral origin (Cheryan & Tsai, 2009). While race is usually understood according to physical appearance or geographical origin, ethnicity

emphasizes shared cultural and historical experiences among a group of people. Swann and her colleagues (2004) regard language, descent, and the subjective experience of belonging to a culturally and historically distinct social group as the key elements of ethnicity.

Although this study does not focus entirely on ethnic identity, it is necessary to review existing studies on Korean Americans' ethnic identity since Korea origin and ethnic identity is central to each of the participant's lives. (Lee & Zhou, 2004). Existing studies on Korean Americans' ethnic identity show three different perspectives (Cheryan & Tsai, 2009).

Korean ethnic identity. Some scholars consider Korean Americans as an ethnic group that has maintained a strong ethnic identity (e.g., Min, 2006). In defining Koreanness, three characteristics are commonly cited: 1.) The homogeneity of the Korean race as single national homeland, language, and culture since the prehistoric origins of the Korean people in the state of Kochosŏn; 2.) The self-representation of Korean racial characteristics as Paedal Minjok, meaning the descendants of Tangun, the founding father of Kochosŏn; and 3.) The shared historical destiny and cultural heritage of Koreans for the last five thousand years (Pai & Tangherlini, 1998).

Scholars find several reasons for Korean Americans' strong ethnic attachment and solidarity. The Korean language, called Hangŭl, functions as a key element in helping Korean Americans maintain their Korean identity. As Durgunoğlu and Verhoeven (1998) indicate, "The most important functions of the

use of the minority language will be intragroup communication and deepening of one's own ethnic roots" (p. xi).

In an effort to maintain their language abilities, many Korean Americans speak Korean at home. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, only 18.06% of Korean Americans spoke only in English at home (Garoogian, 2005). Korean language schools also help Korean American children maintain their native language by providing Korean language classes and teaching Korean culture and history in Korean. According to a report by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology of Korea (2006), in 2006 there were 1,017 Korean language schools in the U.S. with almost 59,000 students attending.

According to Yi (2005), Korean American adolescents use the Korean language at school as a secret code for solidarity among them. TV and radio programs broadcast in Korean as well as Korean-language newspapers have also strengthened their ties to their ethnic community and their home country (Min, 2001). Owing to the development of Internet technology, Korean Americans, especially the younger generation, can visit Korean websites at any time so they can learn about and maintain their Korean heritage (Jung & Lee, 2003). According to a recent survey (Lam, 2009), most of the 1.5 Generation Korean American adolescents used Korean language most of the time (70–90%) when they were online.

Korean churches in the U.S. also function as a gathering place in Korean American communities. By 2007, there were 3,766 Korean churches in the U. S. (Christian Today, 2008) and approximately 75% of Korean Americans are affiliated

with Korean churches (Hurh & Kim, 1990; Min, 2000). Min (2006) explains two major reasons for this exceptionally high rate of church involvement: Korean Christians are more likely to choose immigration to the United States than other religious groups, and many non-Christian Korean immigrants attend a Korean church for practical purposes such as immigration orientation, fellowship, and ethnic education for their children.

According to Chong (1998), Korean churches serve as a primary site of cultural reproduction of Korean identity for second generation Korean Americans. In a case study with second generation Korean American church members including teenagers, she reports that second generation Korean Americans attempt to cope with the problems of marginality by attempting to reclaim their ethnicity and by constructing highly defensive forms of Korean identity. Based on the finding, she problematizes the earlier dominance of the assimilationist paradigm supporting the integration of minority groups into the dominant society.

Assimilationist perspective. Contrary to the Korean ethnic identity perspective, some scholars argue that the assimilation paradigm still works among Korean Americans in some contexts. For example, Saenz, Hwang, Aguirre, and Anderson (1995), in a survey study of 913 Californian children living with their Anglo-Asian parents, shows that almost 60% of the children of Anglo-Korean parents have an Anglo ethnic identity.

Lee (2002), in her dissertation study of 60 adult, second generation Korean Americans living in New York city, also shows that the second generation Korean

Americans spent much of their childhood wanting to be white, not Asian because both their race and ethnicity made them "other" in American society. In addition, she reports that working-class Korean Americans shed their ethnic identity more quickly and willingly than middle-class Korean Americans because they do not want to feel as if they are underachievers when they are compared with more successful second generation Korean Americans. She indicates that this tendency is closely related to an aspect of unique Korean culture involving family honor:

> Success for Korean Americans was important not only because it meant one had a lucrative and/or a prestige job, for example, but also because achieving success was necessary in bestowing honor and status to one's family in front of the coethnic community. (p. 172)

Consequently, this working class assimilates more willingly into the mainstream while not trying to share anything in common with other Korean Americans. Emphasizing their nationality as U.S. citizens, trying to use unaccented English, and acting and talking like Americans can be understood as specific assimilation strategies (Kibria, 2000).

Asian identity. According to Kibria (2002), Korean Americans tend to resist being seen and treated as Asian because of their unique history, ancestry, and culture that is distinct from other Asian countries. Some scholars suggest, however, that Korean Americans' Asian identity can be emphasized in specific situations such as the awareness of racial discrimination (e.g., Fordam & Ogbu, 1986; Porter & Washington, 1993) or the necessity of coming together for common socio-economic

interests (e.g., Kibria, 2002).

In other words, this transnational connection among Asians and cross-cultural identity construction can be said as an effort to create "a third space" (Bhabha, 1994) beyond the totalizing conception of nationhood in order to secure their voice and agency. In the same vein, Lam (2004) calls this space a "border zone" and describes it like this:

> This is a place where there are multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations, where the formation of identity reaches beyond the national borders, where people actively mobilize their diverse sources of identifications to resist subordination, and where new subject positions emerge out of cross-cultural exchange and the negotiation of difference. (p. 13)

According to Yip (1997), the tragedy of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American draftsman who was beaten to death with a baseball bat by white auto workers in Detroit in 1982, is regarded as the beginning point in the development of pan-Asian movement:

> It was the first time, according to APA advocates and academics, that people who traced their ancestry to different countries in Asia and the Pacific Islands crossed ethnic and socioeconomic lines to fight as a united group of Asian Pacific Americans. They were Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino; they were waiters, lawyers, and grandmothers who were moved by the incident that heightened their

> awareness of discrimination and racism directed toward the APA community. (para. 9)

Kibria (2002) describes a unique bond among the persons of East Asian origin. In a study with 64 second generation Korean Americans and Chinese Americans, she shows that the second generation and more generally the later generation of Asian Americans share a culture and world view based mainly on their experience of growing up in the U.S. as people of Asian origin. She suggests that this bond is not simply caused by their particular experience growing up in the U.S. but also because of their shared socio-economic interests, that is, "Their largely middle-class, upwardly mobile characteristics and their sense of identification with the European American experience promoted by these characteristics" (p. 205).

Studies of Asian American identity in U.S. schools are rare. However, considering that school is also a part of society and not a neutral zone, it is possible that a bond among Asian American students exists to make their voices heard. This question is also examined in this study.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD

This is a case study of four Korean American adolescents who engage literacy practices and undergo identity construction through the social networking spaces they access on the Internet. According to Yin (2003), a researcher can choose an appropriate research method based on three conditions: (a) the type of research question posed; (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events; and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. He says a case study is appropriate when research mainly deals with how and why questions, requires no control of behavioral events, and focuses on contemporary events. Research questions addressed in this study fit these conditions well.

In addition, according to Patton (2002) and Stake (1998), a case study is justified because it is based on the choice of the case to be studied rather than the choice of method. I have purposefully chosen the cases of Korean American adolescents to explore their identity construction through their Internet literacy practices.

Research Site

This study was conducted in a mid-size city in the Southwest where seven thousand Korean immigrants lived (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In addition, according to the websites of the local Korean Association, more than two thousand Koreans were staying in this city temporarily for business and educational purposes.

This mobile population from Korea interacted closely with Korean immigrants, producing a unique Korean community culture.

According to my personal contacts with Korean American adolescents in this city for the last five years at community activities such as Korean language school and Korean church, they were from diverse historical and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of them were third or fourth generation Korean Americans who had lived in this city from birth. Others were second generation whose parents originally came from Korea for education or business purposes and gained U.S. citizenship later. Some Korean Americans, while born in the U.S., spent their childhood in Korea and returned to the U.S. to prepare for college entrance. There was a considerable number of young people who arrived in the U.S. at some point with their parents, while in other cases only one parent was of Korean American heritage.

The parents' socioeconomic status also varied. Some were highly educated and worked for information technology industries, hospitals, or universities in the city. Others managed small business such as grocery stores, restaurants, laundries, and other blue-collar workplaces. There were also some economically disadvantaged people who had lost their jobs or worked for small companies as part-time employees without benefits.

The diverse backgrounds of these adolescents resulted in the construction of different identities among them. As an example, *The Korean Daily*, a major newspaper for Korean communities in the U.S., recently carried a story regarding the

gap between 1.5 and second generation Korean American undergraduates at several universities (Shin, 2008). According to the story, members of the 1.5 generation called those in the second generation "bananas," meaning they outwardly resembled Koreans but their way of thinking was the same as Americans, especially those of European origin, while the second generation called the 1.5 generation "FOB" ("Fresh Off the Boat"). The story also reported that these two generations organized Korean students association separately within universities and that conflict occasionally occurred between them. I heard similar stories from the Korean American adolescents that I had met in the city where I conducted this research.

Community activities among Korean origin people were prevalent in the city. They were sponsored by various organizations including The Korean Association, Korean churches, the Korean Students' Association at a major research university, a Korean language school, and Korean based companies. Information about these activities was shared through local Korean newspapers and the websites of these organizations. Consequently, Korean American adolescents were directly or indirectly exposed to these activities. In addition, adolescents met hundreds of Korean international students at school who arrived with up-to-date Korean culture. Throughout this study, I observed that the interaction between newcomers and Korean American adolescents was important in their construction/re-construction of identities.

Participants

Patton (2002) recommends that the choice of case be purposeful so that information-rich cases provide " . . . a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 230). To make it purposeful, I established several basic conditions before recruiting participants:

1. Participants are Korean American adolescents, not sojourners who are supposed to go back to Korea when the purpose of their visit is completed.
2. Participants are familiar with computers and the Internet and frequently engage in Internet literacy practices.
3. Participants have devices available at home to use for Internet literacy practices, including a computer and Internet access.
4. Participants show willingness to participate in this study for several months in various ways with their parents' approval, such as face-to-face interviews, online chatting, and email communication.

A flyer was produced and distributed for recruitment of participants. Written in both Korean and English, it was posted on Korean community websites and the bulletin boards of Korean markets, Korean churches, and other Korean community organizations. It contained brief information about the purpose of this study, the researcher, preferred participants, participants' tasks, and the tentative research period.

As another recruitment method, some of my Korean American neighbors who knew me for several years helped me develop a snowball sampling process (Patton,

2002) which involved obtaining names of potential participants from each person contacted. They recommended their acquaintances to contact me if they met my selection criteria. Of the ten Korean American adolescents who expressed interest participating in the study, seven were located through the snowball sampling procedure.

When a volunteer showed the intention to participate, I asked him or her some questions for recruitment purposes (Appendix A). If I thought the person was appropriate for the study, I arranged a meeting schedule subject to the approval of both the volunteer and his/her parents or guardian. All information about the research purpose, research procedure, timeframe, and the participant's role was explained at this meeting.

Considering that too many participants might prevent sufficient observation and thick description (Geertz, 1973) of each case, I decided the maximum number of participants in this study was four. Since I had more than four participants, I applied the principle of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) in choosing four of them. According to Patton, maximum variation sampling is useful in identifying common patterns among variations so as to make a case study strong:

> For small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in

capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program. (p. 235)

In producing a sample of maximum variation, I selected informants who varied the most in regard to their period of immigration, family history, SES, school, and main activities on the Internet. Though participants' gender was not a serious consideration of this study, I included both female and male participants based on the principle. The four participants I selected were chosen in this way and shown in Table 3.1(all names are pseudonyms). More specific description of each participant follows.

Table 3.1. Basic Information of Each Participant.

Name	Andrew	Jason	Emily	Chloe
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female
Grade	11th	11th	10th	9th
School	White (68.0%) and Asian (18.3%) majority public school; 7.9% economically disadvantaged) *	White (71.9%) and Hispanic (18.4%) majority public school; 15.7% economically disadvantaged	White (60.9%) and Hispanic (24.1%) majority public school; 23.3% economically disadvantaged	Relatively racially diverse public high school; 30.3% economically disadvantaged
Birthplace	Korea	Minnesota but back to Korea at 1 year old	Born and grew up in this city	Korea
Time of immigration	3 years old	15 years old	n/a	7 years old

SES	Mid-high	Mid-low	Low	Mid

* Student demographics were from *Schoolmatters.com.*

Andrew. Andrew was an 11th grader of a white and Asian majority high school (68.0% white, 18.3% Asian, 9.5% Hispanic, and 4.0% African American; 7.9% economically disadvantaged). This uniquely high Asian rate of the school was related to two facts: Asian parents' preference of the school because of the school's high academic achievement and nearby IT-related companies where many Asian employees worked. The Korean population at the school consisted of two groups: Temporary residents and newcomers (1.5 generation) who were the children of the employees of IT-related companies, visiting scholars, and graduate students; the other group consisted of second and 1.5 generation immigrants who, like Andrew, had come to the U.S. in early childhood. The former was the majority of the two groups.

Andrew was born in Korea and spent the first three years in Korea with his grandparents while his parents were studying in the U.S. for their master's degrees in aerospace engineering (father) and physics (mother). He lived with his parents after they started doctoral studies at the university. After receiving their doctorates, his father worked for a NASA-related research center and his mother worked as a full-time researcher at the university. Both remained in the city.

Andrew spent at least one hour per day on the Internet. He was an active member of *Xanga* until he moved to *Facebook* after 9th grade. As president of his high school class, he ran a philosophy discussion group on *Google Groups* with his

classmates for more than two years. Also he had posted almost 800 questions on Q & A sites such as *Answerbag* and *Yahoo! Answer*.

Jason. Jason was an 11th grader of a white majority high school (71.9% white, 18.4% Hispanic, 6.6% African American, and 2.3% Asian; 15.7% economically disadvantaged) located in a suburban area in this city. He knew four Korean newcomers in the school but he was not close to them. He barely knew other Asian origin students except one of his best friends, a second generation Vietnamese.

He was born in Minnesota while his father was studying there as an international student, and returned to Korea with his parents and two older sisters when he was one year old. Then his parents divorced and he grew up in a mid-size city in Korea with his mother and his two sisters until he arrived in the U.S. with his mother and the second sister when he was a 9th grader. After spending one year in a metropolitan city, he and his sister moved to this city because of his sister's college transfer. His mother remained in the metropolitan city doing a part-time job as a personal caregiver. She visited him once or twice per month. His sister was often busy because of her school work, so he had to manage most things by himself.

Jason spent at least ten hours per week on the Internet. He had been a member of *Cyworld* for more than five years and started *MySpace* and *Facebook* after moving to his new school. Also he was spending some time on *YouTube* to learn B-boy dance when I met him. Occasionally he would visit some Korean portal sites and Korean American online communities.

Emily. Emily was a 10th grader in a public school that had a majority of white and Hispanic students (60.9% white, 24.1% Hispanic, 9.8% African American, 4.7% Asian; 23.3% economically disadvantaged). She knew ten Korean origin students in her school but she was slightly acquainted with only two or three of them. Instead, she maintained a strong relationship with other Asian origin students.

She was a second generation Korean American born in the city. Her grandfather had come to the city alone about 30 years ago and worked for a small cleaning company. Then, about 10 years later, his wife and her parents, a newly-married couple at the time, reunited with him in the U.S. and began working for the same company. Her grandfather passed away several years ago and her parents still worked for the same company. Emily and her four-year-old younger sister helped their parents clean buildings on weekends and during school vacations. Her aunt's family recently immigrated to the city from Korea and started a small sandwich shop at a shopping mall. Sometimes she helped her aunt there by taking orders and translating them into Korean.

Emily spent almost two or three hours per day on the Internet mostly watching Korean movies and TV shows at *Redspottv.net*, one of the biggest Korean online communities in the U.S., and other Asian TV programs at *Mysoju.com*, a popular site among Asian American adolescents. She also reported remaining logged-in *Facebook* whenever her computer was on.

Chloe. Chloe was a 9th grader of a racially diverse public high school in the city (47.9% white, 30.0% Hispanic, 18.5% African American, and 3.3% Asian; 30.3%

economically disadvantaged). She reported meeting three Korean origin students in her school but barely interacted with them. When I asked during our first interview if there was any reason why she chose a school that was financially disadvantaged and largely unknown to Korean community, her mother told me that they considered top 10% rule of the University of Texas system, which grants automatic admission to high school students who graduate in the top ten percent of their class. Apparently, they thought this school less academically rigorous than other schools respected in the Korean community, and it would be easy for Chloe to graduate in the top of her class and gain admission to the flagship campus.

Chloe was born in Korea and arrived in the U.S. when she was seven with her family when her father began working for a large computer company in the city. After resigning from the company several years later, her parents began working for a nationwide direct selling company. Although living in the U.S., her family has maintained a close relationship with their relatives in Korea. They visit their family in Korea almost once per year.

Chloe was not a serious Internet user until eighth grade. Occasionally she watched Korean TV shows and dramas through *YouTube* with her laptop, but her parents preferred renting them from a local Korean market so that all her family members could watch them together. Chloe's use of the Internet changed when she became a 9th grader, which I will explain in Chapter 4. When I met her, she was spending almost 10 hours per week on the Internet mostly watching Korean dramas, TV shows, movies, and Korean music videos. She also visited the blogs of her favorite

Korean idols, and searched for recent news about them and their TV programs through Korean portal sites. She also spent at least two-three hours on *Facebook* per week.

Date Sources and Data Collection Procedure

As shown in Table 3.2, data sources included face-to-face interviews, Internet literacy practice logs, multimodal texts produced on the Internet by the participants, online chatting logs, and emails. Among the six sources of evidence discussed in Yin (2003), this study depended mainly on the evidence from archival records, interviews, direct observations, and physical artifacts.

Table 3.2. Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques.

Data Source	Data Collection Techniques	Frequency
First face-to-face interview	* Voice recording and transcription of the interview * Field notes	Once at the beginning of this study
Internet literacy logs	* Participants' self-recording of Internet literacy practice log (Appendix C)	Daily
Face-to-face interviews	* Face-to-face interview regarding the log and captured multimodal texts * Field notes * Transcription of the interview	Weekly or biweekly
Multimodal texts posted on the Internet	* Observation of multimodal texts posted on the Internet * Screen captures of some multimodal texts * Field notes	Daily

Online chattings	* Online chatting with participants * Saving chat logs	Frequently
Emails	* Email communication with participants * Archiving participants' emails	Frequently

Once participants were chosen, I immediately met them respectively for the first interview, which focused on their personal and family history, socioeconomic background, and their history of literacy practices on the Internet. I also asked them about their current favorite websites and main activities on these sites. This interview lasted more than two hours with semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B). Although I prepared interview questions in advance of the meetings, I tried to make the conversation fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) so that they felt agency in telling their own stories and to allow space for unexpected for stories that I did not anticipate.

I told them that they could use both English and Korean according to their preference and I changed my language accordingly throughout the interviews. In order to make our communication clearer, sometimes we would repeat the same content both in English and Korean. Jason's interview was done only in Korean and Chloe's interview was done mostly in English. Andrew and Emily changed their language frequently when they felt one language was better in explaining something than the other. In cases where their quotations and examples were spoken or written originally in Korean, I made a note that they were translated into English.

After the first interview, I spent several weeks exploring the websites they mentioned. I checked demographics of the sites and the types of content shared through them. I also collected products that the four participants produced on the sites. In case of social networking sites such as *Facebook* or *Cyworld*, I traced their literacy practices from the very beginning of their participation. Some of the products were either video-recorded with *Jing* (ver. 1.6) or screen-captured with *Snagit* (ver. 9.0) for quick recall and further analysis. This step was helpful in understanding how their identity had been constructed in these Internet sites prior to this study and helped me prepare questions for subsequent interviews. The accumulated products were frequently mentioned during interviews when discussing their identity construction in diachronic aspects.

In addition to examining their prior Internet use, I also needed to observe their current Internet literacy practices. The challenge, however, was that I could not share physical space with them during these occasions, as their Internet literacy practices occurred at any time and at any cyber space. Some practices such as *Facebook* left digital footprints of their practices, but they were just a part of their whole Internet literacy practices. As Leander and McKim (2003) indicate, I conceded that the traditional notion of place and the role of observer in qualitative research wouldn't hold-up in my study. Consequently, I had found strategies for collecting data all across their Internet literacy practices without my physical attendance. The following two strategies were prepared for that purpose.

First, I asked them their ongoing Internet literacy practices by email or online chatting. Online chattings always started with my questions about their Internet literacy practices of the day. Also, I sent them an email irregularly with the following sentences:

> Hi, OOOO.
>
> Can you tell me where (what sites) you visited and how much time you spent there for the last two hours from the moment you read this message? If less than two hours, let me know just for the time. It does not need to be accurate. Just estimate. Also, if you can let me know what you have been doing there, please do so shortly.
>
> Thanks!

This email was sent to them almost once per week. Then they responded with an email like the following:

> 30 min- watching music videos of *Eru*[iru:] & *FT ISLAND* (Korean singers)
>
> 10 min- *Boys before Flowers* (a Korean drama) on *YouTube*
>
> 50 min- *Facebook*

Second, I asked them to keep an Internet literacy practice log (Appendix C) so that they could write down what they did on the Internet. Enough copies of the log were given to them at the first interview with some explanation about how to keep it.

Several weeks later, the second face-to-face interview occurred. Additional interviews took place almost every second week until I had interviewed each

participant 6-8 times. The purpose of these interviews was to link their Internet literacy practices with the identity they constructed through the practices. I always brought in questions with printed data related to my questions. Also I brought my laptop so we could visit some of websites they had documented on their logs. All the interviews were recorded with two voice recorders (one for backup) and transcribed later. During the interval of each interview, I observed their Internet literacy practices on a daily basis, kept field notes, sent them emails, and chatted with them regarding my prepared questions for the next face-to-face interview.

Analysis

Focus of the analysis. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) state that an empirical study on discursive identity construction may include any of the following approaches: 1). Focus on the analysis of one particular identity category such as gender or ethnicity; 2). Focus on a particular setting for identity construction such as classroom or online; 3). Focus on a particular analytical perspective such as psychoanalysis or positioning theory, and 4). Focus on a specific group. The latter is the orientation of this study. By analyzing the four participants' cases in detail with the consideration of other approaches mentioned above, especially approach number two, this study aims to provide a better understanding of Korean American adolescents' identity construction through their literacy practices in online spaces. Ideally, their cases can be applied to other cases of Korean American adolescents.

As identity is imbedded implicitly or explicitly in every discourse practice, all their literacy practices on the Internet are subject to the analysis focusing on identity construction. However, this study did not pay much attention to their Internet literacy practices that were not necessarily unique to the case of "Korean-American" adolescents. As a student, as a school member, as an adolescent, or a male or female, the four participants share some uncharacteristic identities with other ethnic or racial adolescent groups. For example, "I hate math" posted by Chloe on her *Facebook* was not necessarily regarded as an important data in this study because this identity enactment is not particular to the experience of Korean American adolescents, but is common among youth of all backgrounds and ethnicities. But, another posting, "It's freaking HOT so I should be allowed to wear whatever I want to worship. Gawddd. I hate my parents sometimes.:/," couldn't be considered as a usual youth identity enactment against her parents. Her parents' prohibition in this situation needed to be considered within the contexts of conservative Korean American church atmosphere and her parents' face. So, every literacy practice on the Internet was examined at the point of generality and peculiarity and then triangulated with each participant during face-to-face interviews.

Constant comparative method. Constant comparative method, a central feature of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), was used for data analysis in this study. It is an inductive method to derive a theory by coding collected data into conceptual labels, and then categorizing the conceptual labels into a higher and more

abstract level, and finally recoding and refining the categories toward a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Following the guidelines and procedures of constant comparative method, the analysis began as soon as the first bit of data was collected so that it could be used to direct the next interview and observations. Under the recognition that data analysis was ongoing and occurred throughout the research period, I designed an electronic data analysis template with *FileMaker Pro* (ver. 8.5) in order to make my revision and access of codes and categories more convenient (Figure 3.1). When my laptop was not available, I used a notebook for writing my field notes and theoretical memos (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Immediately following my fieldwork, I entered all contents in my notebook into this electronic template in order to gather all the data into one place.

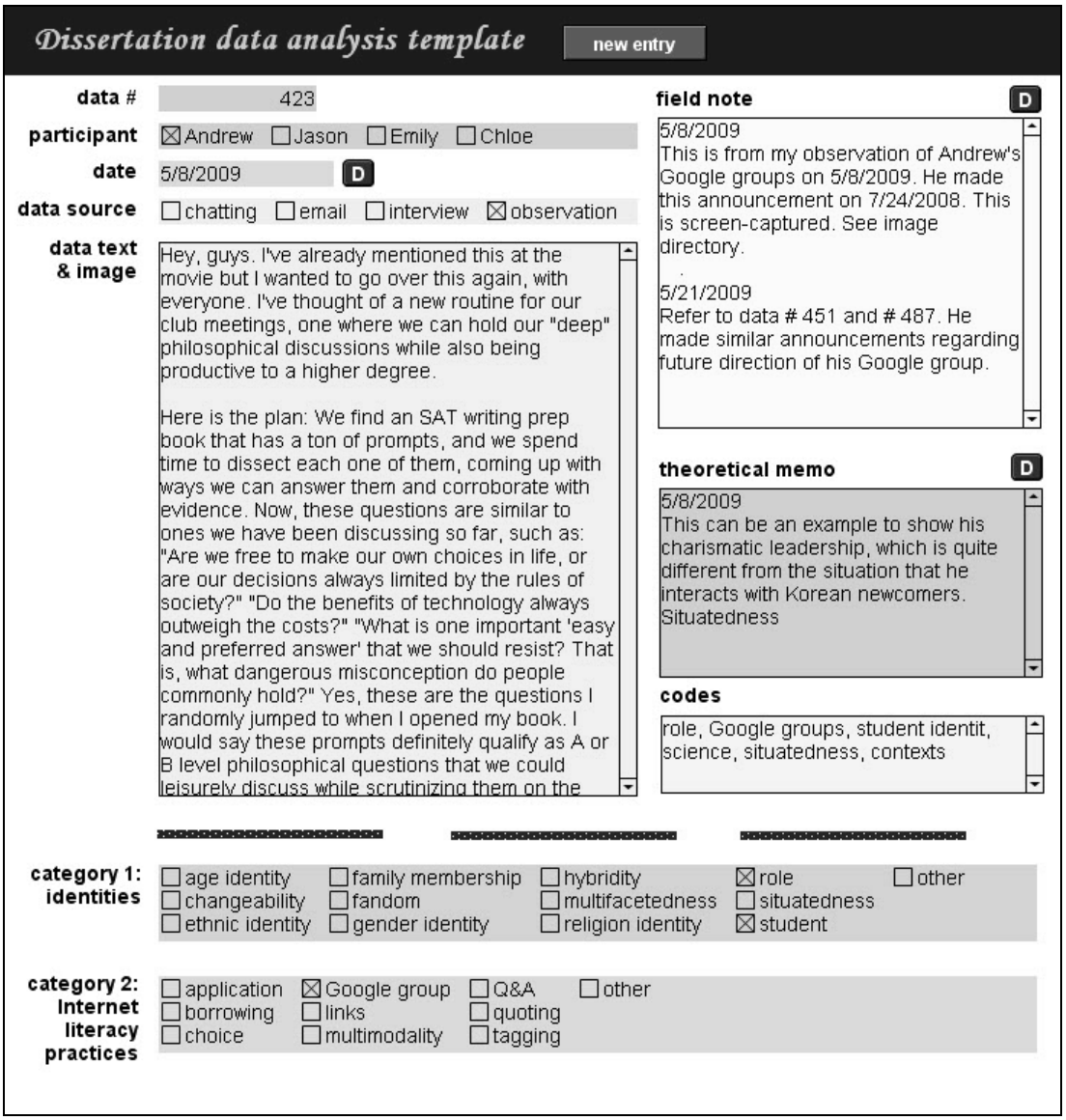

Figure 3.1. Data Analysis Template

As shown in Figure 3.1, once a new piece of data was collected, a serial number was given so that it could be referred to and tracked conveniently later for comparison with other data. Most of products on the Internet posted one time and place were counted as one piece of data and one serial number was given. But, long pieces of data from one event such as interview transcripts were treated in a different

way. They were fully transcribed and reviewed repeatedly with field notes and codes in the margin. Then, they were broken down into several small units and inserted into the electronic template with serial numbers assigned to each.

Filed notes included the context where the data was collected, technological concerns about data collection, self-reflection for the improvement of data collection skills (such as my mistakes during the interview), possible questions for the next interviews, and so on. Theoretical memos were used to keep track of my ideas about the relationship among data, hypotheses of analysis, and generative questions that evolved from the analytical process.

Coding was a useful tool in interpreting my data and stimulating generative and comparative questions which guided me upon return to the field. I attached as many codes as possible to each piece of data to cast a net as wider as possible at the beginning of analysis. These codes were alphabetized on an Excel file and all the data linked with the code were listed on the Excel sheet so that I could see how many data were linked with each code. *FileMaker Pro* was a very useful tool for this search. By continuing this process from the beginning of analysis, I could remove some codes from my focus, combine two or more codes into a higher-level code, and break down one code into two or more sub-codes.

Categorization also occurred from the beginning as codes were created. Based on the codes listed on the Excel file, I continuously made a new category and removed another. In the middle phase of analysis I recognized the necessity to divide the categories into two as shown in Figure 3.1, identities and Internet literacy

practices, for a better analysis. Eventually, these two groups of categories become the body of Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

Trustworthiness

Research based on non-positivistic epistemology establishes its trustworthiness with the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability parallel to the constructs of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity in positivistic research (Mertens, 1998; Schwandt, 1997). These constructs were adopted in this study in the following ways.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the " . . . correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints" (Mertens, 1998, p. 181). Various safeguards were prepared to secure credibility in this study.

Triangulation across sources of data was applied from the beginning of data collection. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data in order to make up missing parts of other data sources so as to avoid biased analysis. Field notes, interview data (face-to-face interviews, online chattings, and emails), multimodal texts produced by each participant, and archival records (the Internet literacy log) were crosschecked for triangulation.

Prolonged and substantial engagement was also an important part to consider in this study. According to Mertens (1998), the time a researcher may leave the field is when the researcher has confidence that themes and examples are repeating

instead of extending. Because identity changes continuously throughout one's life, probably I couldn't leave the field if I wanted to track the continuous change itself. But I could leave the field with confidence as my focus was on substantial description of their past and current shape of identity and its relationship with their sociocultural backgrounds under the assumption that the shape will continuously change in the future as their sociocultural backgrounds change.

Negative case analysis, interpretation of data which is opposite or different from current portrayal of construction, helped me to reexamine my existing framework and, consequently, this to lead to an adjusted direction. I brought the negative cases to face-to-face interviews for more discussion with my participants. In some cases, I sent email to them to ask for their opinion about conflicting data.

Member checking, also described as a criterion of confirmability (Schwandt, 1997), refers to the procedure of verifying a researcher's findings with participants during data collection and data analysis. Not just for the verification of findings, Schwandt indicates that it is necessary " . . . to give them the courtesy of knowing (or to honor their right to know) what the inquirer has to say about them" (p. 89). Member checking was done in two ways in this study. First, during the data collection stage, I summarized to them my emerging findings and asked for their feedback at the beginning of each face-to-face interview. Second, after leaving the field, I sent them emails asking for their feedback.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the outcome of a research can be applied to other situations. With non-positivistic research, both a

researcher and the readers of the research share the responsibility of transferability (Mertens, 1998). A researcher's responsibility is usually called thick description, meaning detailed description of the time, place, context, and culture of the research so that readers of the research can establish the degree of similarity between it and other cases to which findings might be transferred. In addition to thick description in this study, as mentioned earlier, maximum variation sampling and cross-case analysis to identify common patterns across the variation were also the effort to strengthen the transferability of this study.

Confirmability. Confirmability is related to the verification of the fact that the data and interpretation of research are not merely inventions of the researcher. In addition to member checking as a part of the establishment of confirmability in this study, all the data sources were printed and then combined in a notebook so that they could be subject to auditing by the dissertation committee members at their request.

Dependability. The general way to establish dependability is to make as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were always looking over a researcher's shoulder (Yin, 2003). In other words, the research process should be logical, traceable, and documented (Schwandt, 1997). Under the understanding of the importance of dependability, I tried to describe data collection procedure in detail earlier in this chapter and prepared several appendices at the end for reference.

Subjectivity and Rapport

According to Glesne (2006), the nature of relationships in qualitative research depends on at least two factors: Subjectivity, the quality of a researcher's self-awareness of the potential effects of self on his/her research, and rapport, the quality of interaction between the researcher and participants. Glesne indicates that, "A reflective section on who you are as researcher and the lenses through which you view your work is now an expected part of qualitative research studies." (p. 124).

Subjectivity. A human being is the instrument of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). In other words, a researcher's awareness of his/her own values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and needs, becomes the basis for the story that the researcher is able to tell (Glesne, 2006). According to Reinharz (1997), a qualitative researcher brings three different types of self to his/her research: A research-based self, a brought self that historically, socially, and personally creates his/her perspectives, and a situationally created self. Considering these multiple identities, I monitored how my different selves were reflected in this study, recorded it in my field notes, and reported it here as part of the study.

I am a Korean male, in my mid-30s, living in the U.S. temporarily for my doctoral studies. Though I am in the U.S., I have spent a lot of time connecting myself to Korea by reading Korean news, watching Korean television programs, and visiting my Korean colleagues' blogs through the Internet. Except for local weather and some local events, especially for my children, most other U.S. news sounds like foreign news to me. Therefore, it can be said that I stand on the edge of Korean

American community. Though they and I share some Korean heritage, I assume that their attitude toward living in the U.S. is quite different from mine because they are, for the most part, Americans who will live the rest of their lives in the U.S. while I am supposed to leave the U.S. once my goal for staying is completed.

I have had an advantage to interact with the community in diverse ways in this city for more than five years. Through the interaction I have felt a certain responsibility to deliver their untold stories to educational arena and eventually it led me to this study. Just like Moje (2000) confessed in her study with gang-related adolescents, throughout this study process, I came to see myself as an advocate for Korean American adolescents and committed myself to providing a space in which their voices could be heard and their practices understood.

I cannot deny either that I am an advocate for out-of-school literacy and new technologies. I have had much interest in adolescents' literacy practices in and out of school since I was a Korean Language Arts teacher at a high school in Korea. Through numerous formal and informal interactions with them at school, I found that they made their own stories outside of school, which they hardly mentioned in class. My diverse efforts to bring these stories to my class allowed a better understanding of them as my students and provided members of the class with more chances to talk. This experience led me to focus on Korean American adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices, especially on the Internet.

I always try to stay current with new technologies and believe that they expand and change my literacy practices. However, I do not hesitate to rank myself

as a novice compared to the adolescents that I have met. They willingly tell me about current technologies and creative ways to use them when I let go of some of my power and authority as a teacher or an adult. I always tried to keep this position during this study.

Rapport. Throughout the whole research procedure I tried to position myself as a friend or "the least adult" (Mandell, 1988) rather than a supervisor or authority figure while interacting with the participants, with the understanding that rapport is different from friendship and that maintaining rapport sometimes requires safety valves (Glesne, 2006).

Acting as an authority figure or supervisor in this study might have two risks: First, participants might be unwilling to share much of their Internet literacy practices under the perception that adults, especially parents and teachers, tend to regard their activities on the Internet as wasting time. Second, because of particular Korean cultural qualities, such as respect for elders, their perception of the age difference between us might make them hesitant to talk about their essential thoughts concerning their identities.

Also I invited them to my *Facebook* and *Cyworld* at the first interview under the permission of their parents so that they could become acquainted with me easily in one of their favorite ways. In choosing the interview time and place, I always respected their choice at the point that choice is central to agency (Johnston, 2004). Thankfully, this study was implemented within a good rapport with the participants.

They would leave comments on my *Facebook* and send me emails regarding my progress with this dissertation even after data collection was finished.

CHAPTER 4. FOUR STORIES

This chapter describes how the four participants in this study constructed identities through their Internet literacy practices, and how their identities and literacy practices interact with their sociocultural milieu. Most of these stories derived from my interviews with participants. Their responses to my questions regarding the meaning and intentions behind their Internet literacy practices were frequently related to aspects of their life story. I collected the pieces and reorganized them here both in diachronic and synchronic aspects. Deeper analysis across the four cases follow in Chapter Five.

Andrew

When I first met Andrew, he had a hard time constructing his identity apart from his excellence at school and extracurricular activities. He was taking International Baccalaureate classes and running a philosophy discussion group on *Google Groups* as president with his IB class, which included 53 classmates. He also had excellent piano skills, and competed at state-level tournaments. On the surface he appeared to be yet another successful story of Korean immigrant children reported in Korean American newspapers, but I quickly realized my first impression was inaccurate the longer I interacted with him.

"Who is American?" Andrew posted a discussion topic titled "Who is American?" on his *Google Groups* about a year before I met him. In the discussion

thread, he wrote that identity was an abstract concept that he had trouble in defining. He added that he had lived in the U.S. for almost his entire life. He said "our troops" whenever someone talked about Iraq or Afghanistan but he still doubted his Americanness. Although his group members posted more than 30 responses to his question, he felt none of them addressed his inquiry in a manner that satisfied him. Most of the answers talked about the legal particulars of American citizenship and considered Americanness as a matter of free will with no consideration of his peculiar situation.

His struggle in identity construction resulted from the recognition that he might live his life as a second-class citizen in the U.S. in spite of his hard work. During middle school, he tried to dress and act like his white friends to avoid being considered as an “Other” in American society (Lee, 2002). They looked cool and appeared to have more fun than him. He felt they had less pressure to study and be a success academically. He failed some exams intentionally to show them that he was not a “grinder” like they perceived other Asian students at his school. He hoped that his failure would get him out of an Asian majority class. However, his mother prevented his plan, and he received a scolding from his parents that he couldn’t be White.

As time went by, he recognized what his parents said was very possible through the observation of his parents’ life. He saw that they had limited access to the mainstream in spite of their hard work in their careers in science. He thought his parents’ hard work was not properly rewarded. When the Swine Flu broke out in

Spring 2009, he posted a short comment on *Facebook* like the following (Some part of the figure is blurred for identity protection. This rule applies to all figures.):

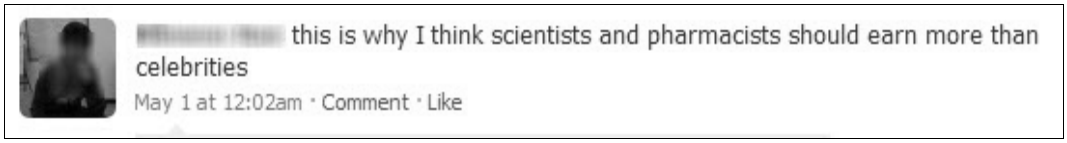

Figure 4.1. Andrew's Comment on *Facebook*

Influenced by his parents, he had an interest in pursuing science as his major in college. He was especially interested in robotics, and wanted to become a scientist, but worried that his effort might not be rewarded properly in the future.

As he reflected on his parents struggle, he wondered if his own story would be any different. He couldn't help feeling a sense of uneasiness and unfairness through his experience at school. He felt unattractive among Asian female students. He complained in one of our interviews:

> [Translated] Lots of pretty Asian female students associate with white male students. But the other case, Asian male and white female, can never happen. Asian male students are considered as uninteresting and boring. Asian males described in Hollywood movies are the same. They are described as crude, dirty, or feeble. …….They [his white classmates] go to a party, get drunk, and even smoke marihuana, but still they get a better job and more money than us.

On his favorite Q&A site, he posted questions underlying his feeling that people in the U.S. treated Asians (or Asian males) unfairly. The following are some examples:

- Why is black culture respected and considered cool while Asian behavior on the other hand isn't?
- Why are black, English, and Latino accents considered desirable whereas people with Asian and Indian accents ridiculed?
- I'm an Asian boy and a few black kids were calling me "chink" and "gook" today. Is it right for me to call them "nigger"?

"I want them to shut up." Due to the sense of unfairness and uneasiness he experienced in the U.S., he thought of living in Korea where most of his relatives including his grandparents were still living. However, since the last winter break, he decided this plan was not so promising based on an interaction he had with a group of Korean newcomers. When he was around them, he was conscious of his unique Korean accent, his limited speaking vocabulary, and he sensed his ignorance of current Korean youth culture. All this contributed to a negative self-esteem that limited his engagement with the newcomers. He sensed that this group of Korean newcomers were not empathetic to his situation, and felt that he couldn't be a member of the group. In an interview, he spoke of his disappointment when he recognized he was different from Korean newcomers:

> [Translated] Until before the last winter, I had a strong pride in my Koreanness. I used to fight against Chinese or Japanese American

> adolescents, sometimes by abusing them harshly, for the pride in my Koreanness on *Asianfinest.com* or *Soompi.com* where many Asian Americans share their culture like movies, songs, and dramas. One day during the winter break, I was invited by the leader of Korean percussion group in my school, which mostly consists of Korean newcomers. I gladly accepted it because I also wanted to be a member so that I could get along with them and learn how to play traditional Korean percussion. But it didn't take long until I came to realize how different I was from them. They mostly spoke in Korean and talked about current Korean youth culture that I couldn't jump in. My situation was never cared. I felt so exotic, like a nerd.

He reported that the experience began a gradual process of abandoning his Koreanness. It was almost his first contact with Korean newcomers because he had had no chance to take the same classes with them at school and he didn't attend Korean church where Korean origin adolescents could easily interact.

As he grew older, frequent conflicts with his father also prompted his abandonment of Koreanness. His parents, especially his father, did not take his struggle for finding an identity seriously. They perceived it as a childish and privileged complaint. He complained to his parents that their emphasis on studying had cost him friendships. The conflict turned into a serious quarrel barely stopped by his mother's interruption. He said his father was living in authoritative Confucian Korean culture that he couldn't agree with.

As his sense of self as Korean shattered, he came to feel that his identity as an Asian became more salient. He wanted to position himself as a proud Asian American, but his attitude toward Asian newcomers, especially toward Korean newcomers, was occasionally harsh. For example, when he observed Asian students being degraded by an American student for speaking their native language, he sided with the American student. In an interview, he told me:

> [Partially translated] Korean FOBs gather in the middle of library in the morning before class starts and start to laugh loudly in Korean. Then a mean white guy passes me by saying, 'Hey, tell them to learn how to speak English.' The white guy doesn't understand I am different from them. Most of them will go back to Korea sooner or later but we have to live here. We have to reestablish Asian students' reputation they spoil. I want them to shut up.

"I am addicted to Answerbag." About the time when I met him, Andrew was eagerly looking for an answer to get out of his uncertain and hopeless status of in-betweenness. Since he had already concluded that high school offered no space for him, he envisioned a happier story in college. Q&A sites such as *Answerbag.com* or *Yahoo! Answers.com* provided him mentors for his plan.

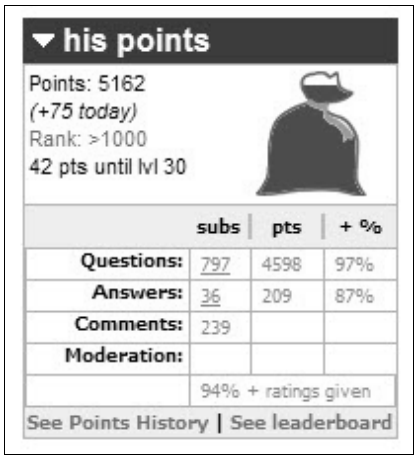

Figure 4.2. Andrew's Participation History on *Answerbag.com*

He had left almost 800 hundred questions after a year on *Answerbag.com* and other users ranked them very positively. Most of his questions concerned choices of college majors, jobs that provided substantial money and a secure future, how to become an attractive male popular to females, characteristics of charisma, and happiness.

He also asked his acquaintances on *Facebook* for advice through Honesty Box (Figure 4.3). The anonymous advice peers gave him allowed him to consider how others perceived him, and how he might improve himself. Also he asked me a lot of questions about his major in college, promising jobs, and his relationship with his parents during the interviews.

Figure 4.3. Andrew's Honesty Box on *Facebook*

Toward the end of data collection, he posted another comment on *Facebook* that indicated his changing thought: "Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die." When I asked what he meant by the sentence by email, he sent me the following response:

> Thanks for asking about this. As you probably know already, I used to be a very bitter and pessimistic person . . . But I believe that now I'm more of an optimist than I ever was. And I hope I stay away from pessimistic/negative thinking. I think what kept me from having many friends had much to do with the fact that I always "had my head in the clouds" thinking about the future, humanity, philosophy, etc. when I really should have been thinking about my character.

It seemed he almost found an answer to an important question in his life out of school, which was not taught at school.

Jason

Jason arrived in the U.S. when he was 15 years old without much preparation for immigration. He didn't even know he had been born in the U.S. until his mother mentioned immigration. He told me that his immigration was decided suddenly and proceeded quickly:

> [Translated] One day, it was during thanksgiving season (September in Korea), my mom asked me if I wanted to study in the U.S. with my second sister. She told me I could attend public school because I had a U.S. citizenship. Then I thought I was not good at school, just in the middle. School was just a boring place to me. So, I said okay even though I was not much prepared to live in a new country. I just attended a private English academy for two months after that. Maybe I was attracted by the fact that I could live in a new country . . . Later I found that mom had considered my military service as well.

The following January, Jason arrived in a metropolitan city in Texas with his mother and second sister and attended a public high school located in a Korean community for about one year. Their first year in the states helped his family to adapt to new environments with the help of the Korean community, especially a Korean church they joined. Jason also connected with 1.5 generation Korean-American friends at his school.

"I was confused when I first saw they recite the pledge of allegiance." In spite of their help, he couldn't be totally free from the burden of settlement. When he

first saw other students recite the pledge of allegiance, he didn't know what to do in spite of his American citizenship. He had never doubted his Koreanness while living in Korea for most of his life. His limited English skill was another obstacle for keeping up with his classes. He wrote about the pressure he felt on *Cyworld Diary* expecting encouragement from his Korean friends and 1.5 generation Korean American friends he met in church and in his school.

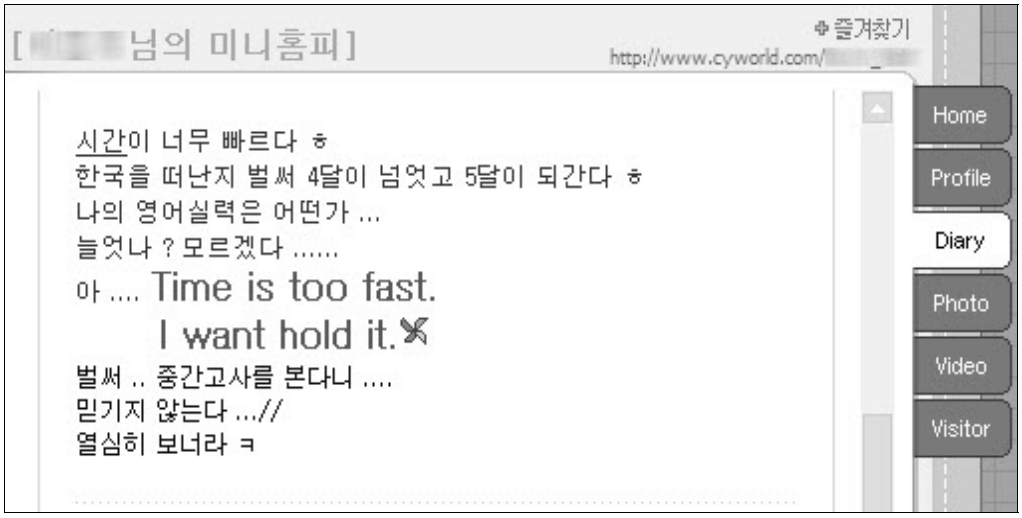

Figure 4.4. Jason's Diary on *Cyworld*

[Partially translated]

Time flows so fast.

Four or five months already have passed since I left Korea.

How is my English skill…..?

Has it improved? I don't know……

Ah……..Time is too fast.

I want hold it.

Midterm exam….already……

I can't believe it….//

I'll do my best.

His friends replied to his diary entry with uplifting messages. He also posted his pictures taken in the U.S. on *Cyworld Photo* and linked some video clips of Korean TV show programs to his *Cyworld Video* so he could remain connected with his Korean friends and Korean origin friends in the U.S., especially the 80 persons with whom he had a 1-chon relationship.

But his activities on *Cyworld* subsided as he became more accustomed to his new environments in the U.S., and especially after joining *Facebook* and *MySpace* soon after arriving in the city. When I first met him, he was visiting *Cyworld* just once a month to check if someone had visited his mini homepage, but was barely making new postings.

"I will not go back to Korea." Spending almost one year in the metropolitan city, he moved to this city with his second sister because of her college transfer. When I asked him why he chose a white majority high school instead of other schools where more Korean origin students attended, he said he wanted to adapt himself to the U.S. culture as soon as possible because he would not be going back to Korea.

His military service problem was the most critical reason for him not to return to Korea. Korean military law has changed since 2006 so that all the males with dual nationalities must serve their military services first even though they intend to abandon Korean nationality. So, once he reaches conscription age and is

conscribed by the government, he can't stay in Korea even temporarily because he is regarded as a "slacker." He was still missing his Korean friends, especially his church friends in Korea, and wanted to reunite with them, but he said he could meet them in cyberspace like *Cyworld* or maybe physically in the U.S. or somewhere else in the future.

He made many efforts to adapt to the U.S. He was doing a part time job at a local movie theater with two best male friends that he met at school, an Anglo and a second generation Vietnamese. They were his lunch friends and classmates at school. Also, he had made a *MySpace* account just because of them and would visit their *MySpace* even though his favorite social network site was *Facebook*.

He mostly got along with the second-generation group at his Korean church which offered two youth groups. One was for newcomers who listened to a sermon communicated in Korean and the other was for the 1.5 generation and second generation group who were familiar with English. However, he mostly spoke in English at church even though he was supposed to speak Korean when in Korean contexts. Even when he spoke in Korean, he didn't use respectful expression to the older newcomers in the youth group. He knew that the newcomers might consider it ill mannered and feel uncomfortable, but he didn't care.

He spent considerable time on *YouTube* learning B-boy dance. He planned to show his dance in front of his school friends at prom after training for an entire school year. His intention for the dance was to show his degree of Americanness to

his friends and convey attractiveness to his female school friends. He posted his dancing video clips on *Facebook* (Figure 4.5).

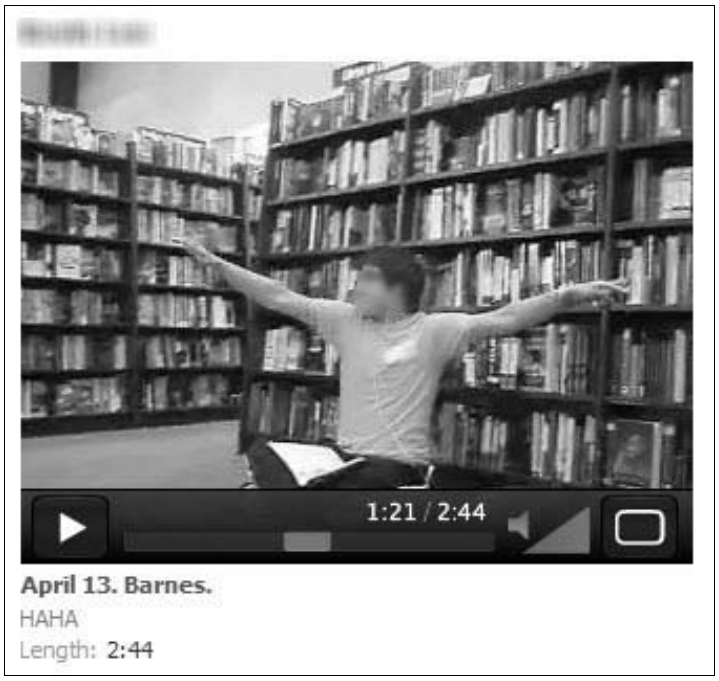

Figure 4.5. Jason's Video Clip on *Facebook*

He also posted most of his content in English on *Facebook* in spite of some grammatical mistakes. He even made comments on his Korean origin friend's *Facebook* in English, who had no problem reading and writing in Korean. This was quite different from the case of Chloe, whom I will describe later.

Emily

Even though Emily was born and grew up in the states, she experienced difficulty during elementary school because of her limited English. She was required to attended ESL classes until fifth grade because she had spent most of her childhood speaking Korean at home with her grandmother while their parents worked late in

the evening. She lived with her grandmother and immediate family in isolation from other ethnic group children in her neighborhood. Occasionally their parents would take time to help her with schoolwork, but their help rarely extended beyond independent reading assignments and spelling test because of their limited English skill.

Her social development was not fostered at school, where she kept to herself. She attended a multiracial elementary school that mostly consisted of Anglos, African Americans, and Hispanics. Her silence in the classroom was considered well-behaved by authorities, but occasionally caused her to be the target of teasing by her classmates. Her sense of vulnerability from the experience resulted in a strong attachment to her family and her Asianness.

"My family is the first." Although having spent her life in the U.S., Emily had no problem conversing in Korean except for having a unique accent and limited vocabulary like Andrew. In order to keep her Korean language, she attended a local Korean school every Saturday throughout her elementary school years. After graduation, she began working at the Korean school as a teaching assistant.

When I asked why she tried to keep her Korean language, she told me two things. First, Korean remained the first language within her family because of their limited English skill, with the exception of her and her younger sister. Second, as one of her future plans, she envisioned living in Korea with her parents as an English teacher. Her father suffered from diabetes with no health insurance and her parents'

English skill was very limited. She thought it might be better for them to go back to Korea some day and live with her.

Even though none of her family members pressured her to take care of them, she felt a strong sense of responsibility for her family. Not only did she willingly help her parents' work, but she also helped her younger sister study. She said her most important identity was being a member of her family. She also wanted to marry a Korean origin male so that her parents and her husband wouldn't experience cultural conflicts.

Although Emily was close to her family, she couldn't overcome the cultural gap between her and her grandmother, especially her grandmother's authoritative practices at home. She gave me an example during one of our interviews:

> [Partially translated] She demands a lot of people to do a lot of things. She keeps grumbling at me and my mother . . . Sometimes she puts her Korean friends ahead of my family. She invites her friends in the evening for dinner without notice. Then we have to move to living room to finish our dinner.

This comment let me know that her thinking was not free from the influence of American culture which values privacy and egalitarian thinking. Emily valued these in spite of her attachment to Korean culture.

She spent almost 80% of her Internet time watching Korean TV shows, dramas, and movies with her family. Korean American online communities rebroadcast Korean TV programs, enabling her family to watch them without renting

a video cassette tape or DVD at a local Korean market. It was her way of sharing Korean culture with her family and one of the ways she kept current with Korean culture and Korean language.

During the data collection period, her favorite Korean TV program was a trendy drama titled *Boys before Flowers* adapted from a famous Japanese comic-strip. Since her mother was also a fan of this drama, they would often discuss the contents and characters. Emily was a member of the group on *Facebook* for one of the show's main characters played by the actor Lee Min Ho (Figure 4.6). She would visit the group to check updated information about his recent activities.

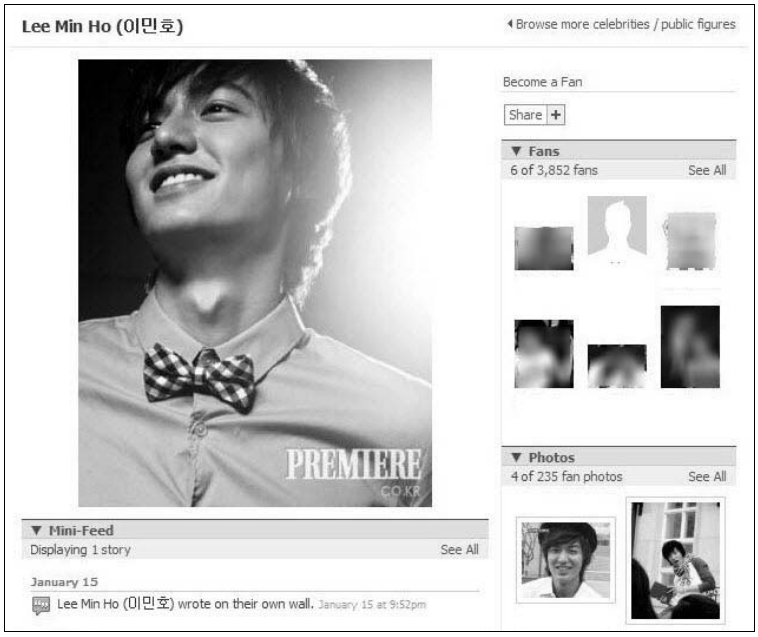

Figure 4.6. Lee Min Ho's Group on *Facebook*

"I am fearful of speaking to Korean newcomers." In spite of her efforts to keep Korean culture, she felt uncomfortable interacting with Korean newcomers. She encountered Korean newcomers at two places: At school on weekdays and at Korean

school on Saturday. Her cousin (aunt's daughter) immigrated into the U.S. in 2007, and she would occasionally have lunch at school with the cousin and the Korean newcomers group at the same table. While talking with them, she sometimes felt offended by their aggressive and open way of speaking Korean slang that was unfamiliar to her. She became hesitant to jump in their talk for fear that they might ridicule her old-fashioned way of speaking Korean.

At Korean school she had similar feelings that Andrew experienced in the percussion group. Because a majority of teaching assistants at her Korean school were Korean newcomers who spoke current Korean, she felt some sort of distance from them. One day she left a comment about this feeling on the *Facebook* wall of her second generation Korean American friend that she met in Korean school (Figure 4.7).

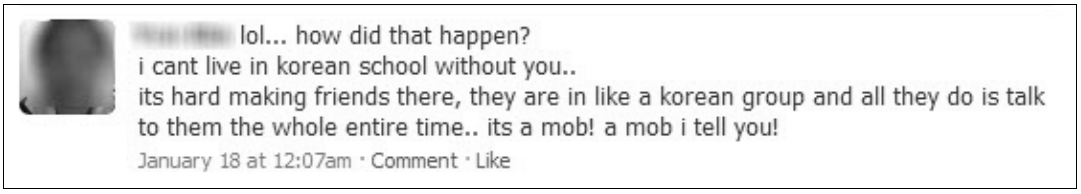

Figure 4.7. Emily's Wall-to-Wall Chatting on *Facebook*

She complained that her affection toward Korean school had changed because of the Korean newcomers. Before they came, she said Korean school was a homelike community for Korean immigrants and their children. Also, as a teaching assistant, she felt agency and pride. But after they arrived, she sensed that her Korean language skills were imperfect compared with them, and she couldn't help feeling that a sense of inferiority and self-doubt.

"I'm too Asian to die." Her interaction on *Facebook* occurred mostly with second-generation Asian male and female students who attended her school. She felt a strong sense of sameness among Asian students as a minority with similar experiences, but was scared of interacting with other racial groups. When a new Asian student arrived, she would volunteer to help him/her with homework and provided tours of school facilities. She performed such volunteer work with pleasure as she could imagine their difficulty adapting.

The Asian students were her lunch friends and members of a *Facebook* group called "I'm too Asian to die!" (Figure 4.8). One common activity among them was watching Asian dramas and movies through *Mysoju.com.* They would talk about them during lunch and exchange information of what they had been watching. Since the videos provided subtitles in English, they could watch them without difficulty. Whenever they found errors or a careless translation in a subtitle, they would send emails to each other.

She was very proud that Korean dramas were very popular among her Asian group, especially among Vietnamese and Chinese students. Occasionally they would visit Emily's house to ask her mother to cook the food they saw in Korean dramas.

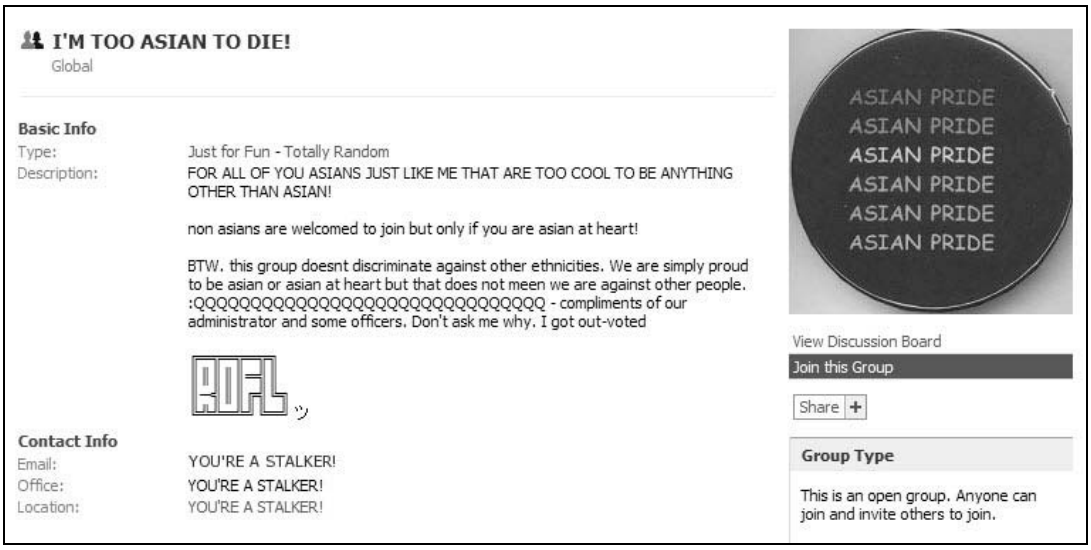

Figure 4.8. Emily's *Facebook* Group Named "I'm Too Asian to Die!"

Chloe

When Chloe arrived in the U.S. at seven years old, she barely spoke any English, but she didn't feel too much anxiety because she had strong support at school and at home. She attended an elementary school where the majority of students were white. She couldn't find other Korean origin students. Even though the school did not have ESL classes, her classroom teacher understood her situation and provided extra time for her in the afternoon to teach her English. Her parents also devoted time helping her with school homework and other extracurricular activities that would improve her English skill.

Her fast and easy adaptation helped her do well at school, but at the same time it made her forget her Korean language. She spoke mostly English at home. Consequently, even though she had arrived in the U.S. at seven years old, her level of Korean skill appeared to be lower than Emily and Andrew.

At school, most of her close friends were whites she had known since elementary or middle school. They would have lunch together and chat about pop culture, shopping, hanging out, or cell phones. She met several Asian students in some classes and sometimes studied with them, but she didn't do any extracurricular or out-of-school activities with them. She had no African American and Hispanic friends either.

"What are you???/KOREAN." Things changed in the middle of her ninth grade year when she began attending SAT study twice per week at a private academy run by a Korean immigrant. There she met almost 20 Korean origin students and became very close to Angela, a second generation Korean American female who was a tenth grader at a local private high school. She became Chloe's guide to current Korean youth culture. Even though Angela was a second generation Korean American born in Texas, she knew a lot of current Korean youth culture having lived in Korea from third to eighth grade because of her father's job. Upon returning to the U.S., she maintained her interest in Korean youth culture, and kept abreast of the latest trends through the Internet.

Chloe started *Facebook* after receiving Angela's invitation. She learned various ways to access Korean TV programs through the Internet while interacting with Angela online. She also came to know various sites for downloading popular Korean songs. Almost 90% of MP3s in her *iPod* were the songs by Korean singers. When I asked how she kept up her white friends' chat topics at school after spending

so much of her time absorbed in Korean youth culture, she said she listened to the radio while studying or doing homework.

Her emerging Korean identity was enacted in several places. Once she posted a note titled '38 things' on *Facebook*, a popular way among her friends to describe themselves with 38 short questions and answers:

[twenty-five] What is a line from one of your favorite songs?

""그리울 때 눈감으면 더 잘 보이는 그런 사람……"

[twenty-six] what are you ???

KOREAN

She copied these 38 questions from one of her friend's *Facebook* and made her own answers. At the 25th question, "What is a line from one of your favorite songs?," she answered the question in Korean with a line of her favorite song sung by FT ISLAND, a popular teen band in Korea. The 26th question was a more direct question about her identity and she responded as "KOREAN."

Like Emily, she was a fan of *Boys before Flowers*. Her favorite actor on the show was Kim Bum, who looked much more serious than Emily's heartthrob. She cropped several photos of Kim Bum with hearts and other decorations and then posted them on her *Facebook* photo album. She also put his picture on the 'Info' page of her *Facebook* and placed a quote in Korean from one of his interviews beneath her *Facebook* profile picture.

Figure 4. 9. Chloe's Quotation from Kim Bum

[Translated] "For people's desire to laugh and cry, an actor can willingly throw away his desire for freedom." – Kim Bum

She also changed her name on *Facebook* from her English name at school to Korean name at home. When one of her school friends asked about her name change, she explained how she had two first names, one in Korean and the other in English, and that her English name was for their convenience of pronunciation at school and her Korean name was her real name.

When on *Facebook*, she tried to type in Korean whenever she encountered or addressed Korean-related contents, in spite of some grammatical errors. Doing so let her preserve the original meaning that can be distorted when translating the Korean language into English. She said emotional words and popular Korean buzz-words among Korean youth couldn't be translated into English properly.

"God is great." Another remarkable change in her life was her conversion to Christianity after attending a youth praise night at a Korean church with one of the church members who attended the SAT academy. Even though her family members

were originally believers in Buddhism and worshiped in the temples when they visited Korea, her parents didn't oppose their daughter's conversion. She told her parents what she had felt at the praise night and her parents understood it.

Her Christian identity was expressed on her *Facebook* in several places. She would make comments on her status bar menu like the following:

- is wondering why God did this to us.
- :) Church is good. God is great. Things are brightening up. ♥
- read the bible today! (: haha, it's amazing. ♥

She also made a link of a *YouTube* video on her *Facebook* about a story of an undergraduate student's belief in Jesus. She left a comment on the link saying "Oh my goodness. Amazing! I love it! It gave me goosebumps. I love Jesus!" Angela made a comment on the video and Chloe responded to the comment again, as shown below.

Figure 4.10. Video Clips Linked on Chloe's *Facebook*

About two months before she started to attend church, she posted another Q&A note titled "MY BIOGRAPHYYYYY ;)" on her *Facebook*. Among about 80 questions about herself, the questionnaire asked, "What makes you most happy?" She responded "family, music, friends." Remembering this Q&A note, I asked this question during our last interview. Then she responded "Jesus, family, and friends." I asked who was the most important to her among the three and she responded "Jesus" without a moment's hesitation.

Summary

This chapter offered a snapshot of the online experiences of the four Korean American adolescents. It had two main purposes. First, this chapter intended to

provide an extended description of the four Korean American adolescents by showing some selective examples of their Internet literacy practices and their interview quotes that described them well. While an extended description of each participant, their sociocultural background, and their life stories were important elements in portraying their identity construction, I felt the introduction to each participant in Chapter Three was insufficient and an inappropriate space for it.

Second, this chapter provided a basis for further analysis in Chapter Five and Chapter Six regarding their identity construction and their agency on the Internet. As Chapter Five and Chapter Six provide cross case analysis, I thought it would be better to describe each case in more detail here. Although this chapter provides a snapshot of each of them, some untold stories and examples remain. They will be described in the next two chapters while cross case analysis proceeds.

CHAPTER 5. READING IDENTITY ACROSS THE CASES

This chapter, through a cross case analysis, aims to analyze how the four Korean American adolescents' identity construction can be understood as multiple, in flux, and in a constant state of becoming. Before reporting the results of the analysis, I describe three things that need to be considered in theorizing identity construction of a specific person or a group.

Three Considerations in Theorizing Identity Construction

Peculiarity. As identity is imbedded implicitly or explicitly in every discourse practice, all their literacy practices on the Internet are subject to the analysis focusing on identity construction. However, this analysis did not pay much attention to their Internet literacy practices that were not necessarily unique to the case of "Korean-American" adolescents. As a student, as a school member, as an adolescent, or a male or female, the four participants share some uncharacteristic identities with other ethnic or racial adolescent groups. For example, "I hate math." posted by Chloe on her *Facebook* was not necessarily regarded as an important data in this study because this identity enactment is not particular to the experience of Korean American adolescents, but is common among youth of all backgrounds and ethnicities. But, another posting, "It's freaking HOT so I should be allowed to wear whatever I want to worship. Gawddd. I hate my parents sometimes.:/," couldn't be considered as a usual youth identity enactment against her parents. Her parents'

prohibition in this situation needed to be considered within the contexts of conservative Korean American church atmosphere and her parents' face. So, every literacy practice on the Internet was examined at the point of generality and peculiarity and then triangulated during face-to-face interviews with participants.

Identity salience. In addition to the consideration of relevance to "Korean-American" adolescents, I also had to consider the extent to which they considered these online sites of identity construction as being a salient part of their lives. I found through this study that the degree of identity salience was not always proportional to the quantity of products on the Internet. For example, some of their *Facebook* group membership barely meant anything to their lives. Moreover, they didn't even recognize some of the people on their "Friends" page when I asked them to recite the names on their *Facebook* friends. Ironically, Andrew had the largest number of friends (more than three hundred) in spite of his sense that he had no friends around him. This could be interpreted as his performance of a popular identity through displaying the number of "friends" he had, even if he had no relationship with these people in a face-to-face context.

In order to address the degree of awareness participants had in their own identity construction, I asked them during our interviews about the most important identities they had at the moment. Since these were not always conscious or easily recalled, I gave them some possible choices related to their identity construction I had observed from online interactions, and then asked for their decision. I thought

the choice questions could make their identity salience more conspicuous (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

These conversations also functioned as a member checking tool, ensuring that my interpretations of their identity enactments online were aligned with their intentions. For example, when the *World Baseball Classic* was occurring in Spring 2009, I asked them which team they were going to cheer for between Korean team and US team. I asked Jason this questions in one of our interviews and he told me "Team USA." Then after several seconds' hesitation he said, "[Translated] Because I am an American." Questions of this nature were important for confirming his ethnic identity change. I chatted online with Chloe and asked the same question. Her answer was very short and clear: ":) KOREA, FOR SUREEEEEEEE!" To Emily and Andrew, I sent emails respectively and received their responses:

> [Emily]
>
> hahaha....
>
> even if i am korean american, i would vote for the korean team...
>
> no matter what sport it is Korean Teams are my first choice...
>
> USA teams does not get my attention at all...
>
> it could be because my parents are cheering for a korean team, but i think being part of the korean team is better than cheering for the american.
>
> [Andrew]

"I would cheer for Korea > Asia > US. After that, I have no preference."

Emily's response reconfirmed her strong family membership and her leaning toward Koreanness over Americanness. Andrew's answer was also interesting because this email was sent to him several months after his debacle with the percussion group, but he still put Korea first. When I addressed this in our next face-to-face interview and he told me that "[Translated] Yes, that's true. But how can I cheer for Chinese team or Japanese team over Korean team?" This indicated that even though his sense of Koreanness became weakened and the sense of Asianness was salient, the sense of Asianness couldn't value any specific Asian country over Korea especially, especially in light of the its unfortunate relationship among the Far Eastern Asian countries in the first half of the 20th century.

Situatedness. Since all literacy practices are located in particular places and times (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000), I considered the situatedness of their identity construction. Boyd and Ellison (2008) indicate that it is the same even in social network sites:

> While SNSs are often designed to be widely accessible, many attract homogeneous populations initially, so it is not uncommon to find groups using sites to segregate themselves by nationality, age, educational level, or other factors that typically segment society, even if that was not the intention of the designers. (p. 214)

Jason's move from *Cyworld* to *MySpace* and *Facebook* highlights the segmented characteristic of social networks sites, situatedness in other cultures. My observation of the move helped triangulate his change in ethnic identity.

Considering that *Facebook* is an American-based social network site initiated from Harvard University, Chloe's use of Korean language on *Facebook* was an important moment in this study because it revealed a deliberate choice in foregrounding her Koreaness, even if it meant excluding American friends she had had since elementary and middle school. More importantly, her use of Korean language helped me bring in the notion of agency afforded by the Internet environment, which is a topic I explore further in Chapter Six.

The fact that none of the four participants posted their family's photos, especially photos with their parents on *Facebook*, showed the situatedness of *Facebook* as a particular Discourse community where parents were not approved members or participants. Posting family photos implied that their *Facebook* was linked with their parents and the possibility of being monitored by them. Emily said, "[Translated] They [my friends] would leave my *Facebook* and will never return if they think my mom watch my *Facebook*. Maybe I will do the same."

In Andrew's case, he barely posted products related to his ethnic identity on *Facebook*, but a lot of his questions on *Answerbag.com* addressed his struggle with his ethnic identity that he didn't want to show to his acquaintances on *Facebook*. On *Facebook*, he didn't even post any photos other than his profile photo. He even removed the 'Photo' tab from his *Facebook* profile. He decided that he didn't have

enough pictures to display his intimate relationship with his friends, despite that this was an implied expectation and considered a type of "coolness" (Boyd, 2008).

Multifacetedness

The notion of multifacetedness indicates a person has multiple identities regarding his or her social role, gender, ethnicity, religion, and so forth and that a certain identity is enacted in a specific situation (Rubin, 1995). Considering that a more nuanced understanding of a person is afforded when this multifacetedness is considered, this section describes the multifacetedness of participant's identity enactments.

Hybrid Korean American identity. One converging point across the cases was the appearance of hybrid Korean ethnic identity constructed by 1.5 and second generation Korean American adolescents. They had spent most of their lives in the United States trying to maintain their Korean heritage by using Korean language at home, attending Korean language schools, churches, Korean community-related activities, and accessing Korean-related Internet websites. While existing research documents the Korean ethnic identity as one among three possible ethnic identities constructed among Korean Americans, participants revealed what they had constructed as Korean American was different from the newcomers.

The difference was not easily noticed during the period that they were around a majority of Korean American adolescents. That their Korean ethnicity was mixed with some American culture was considered natural and unmarked among them. But,

as the Korean American community became globalized, many newcomers fluxed into them. Consequently, they confronted situations where the difference was accentuated. Andrew's school experience with Korean newcomers and Emily's experience at Korean school exemplified the case.

I described participants' hybrid identity with several cases in Chapter Four, but they spoke of more serious cases during our interviews that exemplified the gap between them and Korean newcomers. Andrew told me that their conflicts at school sometimes turned into quarrels and fist fights. Improper respectful expression of the younger second generation Korean American to the older Korean newcomer was a main cause of the fight. Jason told me that such fights occurred even in church on occasion.

Gender identity. While gender identity goes beyond the purpose of this study, gender is closely related to the four participants' ethnicity and warrants some discussion. Participants represented their gender identity differently on the Internet. As I described in Chapter Four, Emily and Chloe (Figure 4.6 and 4.9) frequently addressed their interest in Korean male celebrities through their *Facebook*, but Andrew and Jason never posted any content related to their preferred female celebrities. Also, Emily and Chloe directly stated their preferred ideal male type on *Facebook* notes. Emily and Chloe were also fans of their school's football team, and some of its players in addition to being fans of a quarterback who played for a university team in the city.

Unlike the two female participants, I couldn't find any product on Andrew's and Jason's *Facebook* related to their preferred female celebrities. Even though their schools had good football teams, they didn't show much interest in the white and African American male majority sport. They cheered for their school team as school members, but their interest didn't go beyond school membership.

Andrew deliberately avoided posting gender-related contents on *Facebook* because of the sense that Asian American males, including him, were considered the least attractive males in the United States. As described in Chapter Four, he would display his discontent on the Q&A sites where his identity was more protected. Instead, on *Facebook*, he wanted to represent his attractiveness by representing his philosophical and rational character. Jason's case was slightly different. He admitted the stereotype concerning the attractiveness of Asian males existed, but he believed that he could make a desired impression on others (Goffman, 1959) by performing a sexually desirable masculinity through displaying pictures and videos of him showing off dance moves intended to attract females and by displaying tough language like the following:

Figure 5.1. Jason's Use of Tough Language

Asian identity. In this study Emily showed the most salient Asian identity among the four participants through her school friendship and her Internet literacy practices. Andrew also showed his Asianness through the questions he posed on Q&A sites and his story of "I want them to shut up" introduced in Chapter Four. Their construction of Asian identity was understood as a sense of belonging in order to " . . . stand in opposition to dominant White America" (Cheryan & Tsai, 2009, p. 132).

As Williams (2006) indicates, Emily's group of "I'm too Asian to die!" and their logo of "Asian Pride" could be considered as an example of their active defense of their "professional identity" degraded by a dominant discourse at school such as "you are so Asian!," which connoted boredom and being a "grinder":

> Yet the literacy identities that are regarded as legitimate in the academy can often run counter to our other identities outside the classroom, leaving us feeling isolated and powerless. At such moments we must decide whether to accept the institutional and cultural definitions of ourselves, or to try to find some way to resist or negotiate a professional identity that allows us to live with ourselves while continuing to do the work we value. (p. 1)

Jason's Asianness was not found easily in his Internet literacy practices. He didn't hang out with Asian students at school either. But, as mentioned above, I could see his Asian male identity become more salient when he talked about his future spouse. He said he preferred a Korean origin female but, if not, any Asian

ethnic female was still okay. He didn't consider marriage to a Hispanic or African American female because he thought that would be downgrading himself. Ironically, in spite of his anger with the Asian stereotype and his desire for equality, Andrew also told me that he wouldn't marry an African American female because of the same reason as Jason.

One converging point across the cases regarding their Asian identity was that their recognition of race identity was constructed mostly within the relationship with the white group. Because of the stereotypes about Hispanic and African American groups such as drug, alcohol, and violence, their interaction with them rarely occurred except when a Hispanic and African American student was in their study group. This showed Korean American adolescents' isolation was occasionally self-imposed by their own prejudice and was double-layered: One from other race groups and the other within the same Korean ethnic group.

Family membership. Korean American is an ethnic group with a strong family membership (Min, 2006). However, these cases revealed some difference in the degree of family closeness with respect to gender. In Emily and Chloe's cases, ties with their family remained tight. For example, they wanted to marry a Korean origin male in the future. Chloe also stressed establishing a relationship between her spouse and her family members. Lee (2004) once reported a similar result, based on the interviews with 100 (50 males and 50 females) Korean American community college students in the New York area:

> They indicate that they prefer to marry a Korean American because they believe that it is in the best interest of the family. More specifically, the respondents state that marriage is a union of two families rather than two individuals. Hence, it is important for the partner to be compatible not only with the respondent but also with the rest of the family, especially with the parents who did not speak English very well. (p. 289)

However, the case of Andrew and Jason was different. Andrew's relationship with his family, especially because of his frequent conflicts with his father, was unstable. Jason also didn't think of supporting or living with his mother after his marriage, which is not usual in Korean. The situation is changing but it is still conventional in Korea that children, especially the eldest son, to take charge of supporting their parents as they grow older. Also, his part-time job at a local theatre was partially because he wanted to establish financial independence from his mother. This difference might be understood as either the male participants' higher hybridity or the female participants' stronger sense of family membership. This needs to be explored further with more cases in the future.

Different roles. On *Answerbag.com* or Honesty Box of *Facebook* (Figure 4.3), Andrew positioned himself as a humble seeker, but on Google groups, his insecure and uncertain ethnic identity was less marked as he positioned himself as a charismatic leader. His charismatic character is evident in the following excerpt from

an announcement he wrote on *Google Groups*. He decides the meeting date, cheers up the group, and suggests its direction:

> Philosophy club members,
>
> It seems that this year everyone is struggling with their schoolwork (busy work) and are just hoping for that extra time in their day.
>
> Instead of having weekly meetings, we can rant and discuss all of our topics online (it wouldn't really make a difference). If anyone objects and wants to continue having weekly meetings, please feel free to protest. Otherwise, the Google Group will be our main source of discussions. The club lives on. - **Oct 25, 2008**
>
> There will be no meeting this week due to IB Amazing Race this Friday. Also, for those who are taking the SAT on Saturday, go home and get some sleep. - **Mar 10, 2009**

Emily provides another example of different identities enacted in different contexts. On the *Facebook* group she positioned herself as a shy follower with no expression of her affection because she was not familiar with most of the members, who looked very savvy in current Korean culture. On the contrary, on *Mysoju.com*, she positioned herself as an active commentator on Korean dramas for her Asian school friends. Also in off-line, her positioning as a silent friend at the lunch table with her newcomer cousin and her friends was quite different from her talkative character to her Asian group.

Fluidity

Fluidity here indicates the ever-changing characteristic of one's identity according to the change of sociocultural environments in a diachronic perspective. This study observed fluidity in several aspects.

The first case was the change of identity salience within a category of identity. Andrew's salience of Asian identity from Korean ethnic identity and Jason's salience of American identity (Assimilationist perspective introduced in Chapter Two) from his Korean identity, and Chloe's move from Buddhism to Christianity could be examples of their ethnic identity change and religion identity.

The second case was Chloe's salience of her Korean identity from the status of stable dual ethnic identities. Until her middle school period, her American identity at school and Korean identity at home coexisted without serious consideration of one's superiority over the other. Cheryan and Tsai (2009) indicate this coexistence is possible because they are orthogonal. Moreover, they indicate that, if possible, having both ethnic identities is desirable for psychological protection and positive ethnic group relations. But, in Chloe's case, her Korean identity became more salient over her American identity since her assimilation with other Korean American adolescents during ninth grade.

Thirdly, Chloe's conversion to Christianity from Buddhism, in another aspect, could be understood as the change of her salience hierarchy (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) across identity categories from "family (family membership) first" to "Jesus (religion identity) first." As Stern (2008) indicates, this could be understood as her sense of

independence from the family as her development in the second decade of life proceeded:

> The second decade of life is typically a time of significant physical and psychological change that has consequences for identity. Biologically, individuals experience puberty and subsequent bodily transformations. …. Moreover, as children start to appear visually more adultlike, those around them begin to treat them differently. Social expectations often accompany these changes, as young people desire and are often encouraged to take more responsibility for their own decision making, to forge new relationships, and to practice greater autonomy. Adolescents frequently begin to spend less time with families, more time with friends, and even more time alone. (p. 97)

The fourth case was continuous appearance and decline of transient group identity or fandom (Merchant, 2005) according to the change of their interests in popular culture. For example, at the beginning of this study, Chloe's *Facebook* wall was covered with her affectionate expression of FT ISLAND, but I observed the space morph over to 2PM, another teen band in Korea.

Summary

This chapter implemented a cross case analysis to describe how the four Korean American adolescents had constructed their identities through literacy

practices on the Internet. In addition to reporting findings of identity construction from the four Korean American adolescents, this chapter described three points to be considered in theorizing identity construction.

The first point was that a specific group's identity construction was a peculiar experience according to their unique sociocultural backgrounds and yet shared some general points with other groups in the same age, gender, or class. So, a study on identity construction with a specific group always needs to consider the peculiarity of the group at the same time generality across unfocused groups in theorizing their identity construction. The second point was that the degree of identity salience was not always proportional to the quantity of products on the Internet. This implies a researcher who explores a person's identity construction needs to prepare a method to examine untold but salient identity of the person. The third point was that one's identity construction was situated within specific time and place. This implies a full and unbiased description of the person's identity construction is only possible when identity construction in diverse situation is considered at the same time.

The result of cross case analysis was described in both synchronic (multifacetedness) and diachronic aspects (fluidity). By synchronic, I focused on what categories and roles of their identity were shown in their ongoing Internet literacy practices and which one was shown salient. By diachronic, I focused on how their identity construction had changed according to the change of sociocultural environments surrounding them. The point here was not on that multifacetedness and fluidity were unique characteristics found only in the case of Korean American

adolescents' identity construction. Rather, multifacetedness and fluidity are general phenomena in identity construction. The point in this chapter was to show what unique sociocultural factors influenced the multifacetedness and fluidity in the case of the four Korean American adolescents. This implies that it is necessary for researchers to explore what other sociocultural factors influence other ethnic groups' identity construction. Accumulated data from these studies and cross analyses of the data could contribute to a more reliable and generalized theory of adolescents' identity construction.

CHAPTER 6. THE INTERNET AS A LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

> Far from viewing their introduction as merely more sophisticated electric versions of print literacy, over the last decade theorists have instead described these new technologies as revolutionary in their potential to provide adolescents with an unprecedented range of moves, of strategies for freeing themselves from the ennui of traditional school programs and print-based curriculums. (Dressman et al., 2006, p. 141)

This chapter aims to explore how the four participants in this study understood the Internet as a literacy space and utilized its affordance for their identity construction.

As Moje (2004) indicates, different spaces provide people with different affordances in constructing identity. As Dressman and his colleagues indicated above, existing studies have focused on the Internet rather than spaces in school as virtual space offering users the possibility to construct different versions of self. Especially the studies on immigrant adolescents have described the Internet space as a "cyber-shelter" (Yi, 2007, p. 28) where they could construct an affirming sense of self in a more relaxed environment (Black, 2009).

Identity construction on the Internet can be compared to designing an ever-changing bricolage from diverse digital fragments such as still images, video clips, sound, written texts, and so on (Burnett & Wilkinson, 2006). The concept of bricolage can be defined as a way of meaning making that places " . . . fragments

within a single work-in-progress, an evolving active construction that constantly sheds bits and adds bits" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008, p. 43). In this chapter I explore how the four participants made a bricolage of themselves by continuously selecting diverse digital fragments around them and placing them in cyber space in creative ways.

Outsourcing

The first remarkable way they utilized affordances of the Internet in their identity construction was how they brought in diverse sources from other people. This amounted to a type of outsourcing that followed four patterns: Participating in diverse applications available on social networking sites, creating links, quoting, and borrowing.

Participating in diverse applications. An application is a unique characteristic of *Facebook* made by *Facebook* developers, which allows its users to personalize their profiles and perform other tasks such as comparing movie preferences, making charts of travel histories, or participating in diverse quizzes (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). One common finding across the participants' *Facebook* activities was that they frequently participated in these applications for self-exploration and self-reflection.

First, they utilized applications to explore uncertain aspects of themselves by taking quizzes such as "What is your best trait?" (Andrew), "How MEAN are you?" (Jason), "What kind of debater are you?" (Emily), or "What major should you

study?" (Chloe). Upon completion of these surveys, participants would occasionally post their results on their *Facebook* walls for everyone in their social network to read. The results provided them occasions for self-reflection, and write a response regarding their results. The applications also let their friends comment on the results. Friends wrote their responses half jokingly and half seriously. The feedback peers provided helped participants sense how they were seen by their peers.

Andrew, for example, once took a quiz entitled, "The World's Smallest Political Quiz" on *Facebook* and got "Centrist" as his political position (Figure 6.1) among five groups: Libertarian, Left (Liberal), Statist (Big government), Right (Conservative), and Centrist. According to *Wikipedia*, the quiz consisted of 10 questions divided into two groups, economic and personal, of five questions each.

I found the result during my daily observation of his *Facebook* activity and referred to it during our interview. He responded with the following statement:

> [Translated] Personally I agree with gay marriage and abortion. But regarding tax issue, I think the right is correct. I see a lot of guys at school enjoying their life without effort, but I always try hard. If my hard effort can't be rewarded properly in the future, it's too unfair and sad. But I'm not saying that I'm in the extreme right because there could exist some people in poverty in spite of their effort. So I am not sure yet. It's just a temporary thought. Maybe after I enter college, I could get a better idea on this.

Regardless of the accuracy of the result, the quiz at least provided him a chance to contemplate his fragmented and unsure thoughts about social and political issues.

The participants also utilized applications to compare the results with their current sense of self. While some results reconfirmed their existing self-conception, others caused a strong disagreement. For example, in Figure 6.1, Emily examined her ethnicity with a quiz entitled, "What is Your Actual Ethnicity?" and got the result of "Asian." The following description accompanied her result: "You're super smart, good with computers and cars, love seafood and wearing colorful robes. You are very strict with your traditions, and you keep close contact with your family." She agreed with the result by saying "These quizzes are fun and accurate . . . sometimes . . ." on her *Facebook* wall.

Figure 6.1. Emily's Quiz Application Result on *Facebook*

However, in some cases, they expressed disagreement with quiz results. For example, when Chloe completed a quiz entitled, "What Type of Asian Are You?" and she got "South Korean" as the result as shown in Figure 6.2.

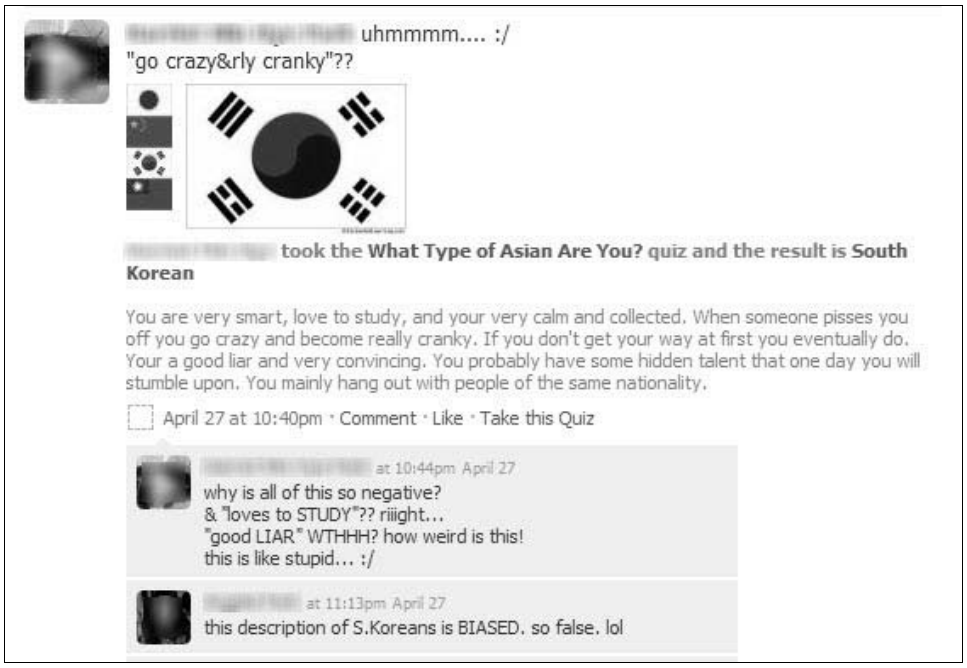

Figure 6.2. Chloe's Quiz Application Result on *Facebook*

Although she received an answer she anticipated, she couldn't agree with the description that followed her result:

> You are very smart, love to study, and you're very calm and collected. When someone pisses you off you go crazy and become really cranky. If you don't get your way at first you eventually do. You're a good liar and very convincing. You probably have some hidden talent that one day you will stumble upon. You mainly hang out with people of the same nationality.

She thought the description about South Korean sounded very negative, so she wrote the following response contesting the statement: "…how weird is this! This is like stupid… :/." Angela (Chloe's guide of Korean culture, introduced in Chapter Four) agreed with her. Her disagreement with the result and Angela's

concurrence showed them as active meaning makers, not as passive readers, who displayed their attitudes toward texts on the Internet and criticized the texts produced by others, especially those they perceived inaccurate, shallow, or essentializing of themselves and others.

Making links. Making links on their social network sites to diverse outside content was another way of outsourcing to describe themselves on the Internet. This was evident in Chapter Four, Figure 4.10, when I described Chloe's making a link to a *YouTube* video clip as an expression of her Christian identity. Through making links to outside content, they expressed their thoughts and interests indirectly.

The most frequently linked contents across four participants were *YouTube* video clips. Emily and Chloe made links to *YouTube* video clips of Korean singers and dramas on their *Facebook* walls. Jason's links were mostly about B-boy dancing and his favorite movies such as the X-Men series, Transformers, and the Bourne Trilogy. Instead of attaching video clips on his *Facebook* wall, Andrew would leave website addresses with a short explanation about the contents.

All participants made lists of their affiliated groups, fan pages, favorite books, movies, and songs within the 'Info' section of their *Facebook* profile. This was another linking system they utilized to show their membership in particular groups, interests in social matters, celebrities, and favorite popular culture. Making these lists on *Facebook* was optional, but all the four participants had made some lists on it, as it appeared to be a norm among members of their social networks.

In Andrew's case, he made a relatively long list on his 'Info' page (Figure 6.3) regarding his favorite movies and books. It also displayed his association with 26 local and global groups. Each of the listed items was designed to be connected to a specific person's or group's *Facebook* profile so that more information of the item could be accessed there. He updated these lists as his interests and group affiliation changed.

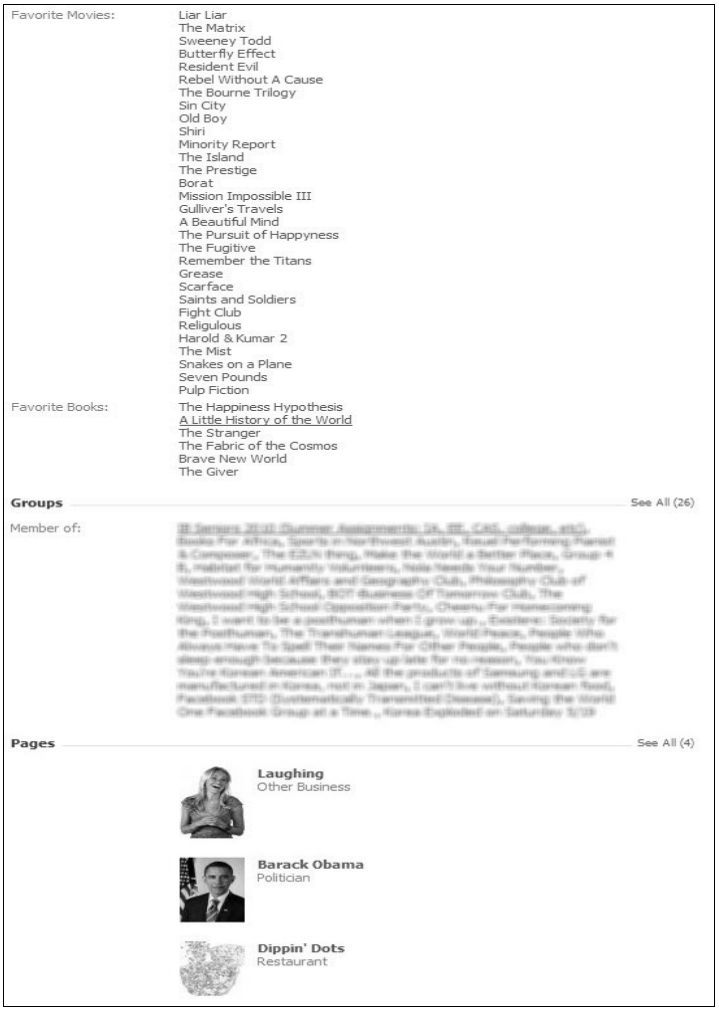

Figure 6.3. Andrew's *Facebook* 'Info'

Figure 6.3 was captured at the beginning of data collection. His group affiliations such as “People Who Always Have To Spell Their Names For Other People,” “Make the World a Better Place,” or “World Peace” provided me some indication that he was using them to explore and construct identities within these various groups, and that his intentional display of his affiliations on his ‘info’ page provide others insight into aspects of his identity.

Quoting. Quoting statements from celebrities, philosophers, literacy books, or TV dramas was another way these youth appropriated various media to describe themselves and display their beliefs and interests. I frequently observed in Chloe’s *Facebook* quotations from the Bible and the words of CCM (Contemporary Christian Music).

Andrew would post his favorite quotations on his *Facebook* profile and update them occasionally as a way to author a self that may not have been so easily construed in his face-to-face interactions with others:

"There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept." - Ansel Adams

"War does not determine who is right - only who is left.” - Bertrand Russell

"I would rather discover one true cause than gain the kingdom of Persia” - Democritus

"Confusion is a word we have invented for an order which is not understood." - Henry Miller, Tropic of Capricorn

"An eye for an eye, will make us all blind."

Andrew got these quotations from his class readings, other websites, or even from public restrooms. These quotations expressed his interests in science, philosophy, and social issues such as peace, equality, and mutual respect.

Borrowing. Emily and Chloe would often borrow other *Facebook* users' unique ways of presenting the self. When they found an interesting way their friends had described themselves, usually through some type of informal template or questionnaire. They copied and revised these appropriate to themselves and then posted it on their *Facebook* profile for others in their social network to read. Some examples included, "ABC About You Question," "100 Questions about Me," and "Random Questions About You". The following example was a part of Chloe's "ABC About You Question":

A - AVAILABLE: haa! im a married woman(:

B - BIRTHDAY: feb. 23rd

C - CRUSHING ON: JUNSUUUUU from 2PM.

D - DRINK YOU LAST HAD: OJ

E - EASIEST PERSON TO TALK TO:friends

F - FAVORITE SONG: only you-2PM

G - GUMMY BEARS OR GUMMY WORMS: GUMMY BEARS FOR SURE!:D

H - HOMETOWN: SuWon, South Korea

I - IN LOVE WITH: Kim Bum&2PM

J - JUGGLE: i tried and failed

Multimodal Construction of Self

The Internet environment enabled the four participants to portray themselves in creative ways by utilizing diverse semiotic systems. Not long ago, making multimodal texts for the publication on the Internet required considerable knowledge of computer software programs such as Photoshop and video editing programs, but the recent Internet environment provides easier on-the-spot tools so that users can make multimodal texts online without using software programs.

Development of digital devices also has contributed to easy publication of multimodal texts on the Internet. Most digital cameras and mobile phones now provide a movie mode, allowing Internet users to post their video clips on the Internet with ease and speed. All the self-made video clips from participants in this study except Andrew (he posted no video clip) were taken with either their digital cameras or mobile phones, indicating that hybrid tools (e.g., a phone with a video camera) enable youth to compose through multiple modalities for their social network from almost any location. Although all the texts produced through *Facebook* are multimodal, this section concerns only a few cases to illustrate multimodal affordance of the Internet.

Multimodal construction of mini-homepage. First, Jason's *Cyworld* mini-homepage (Figure 6.4) was an example of the multimodal representation of himself through multiple sign systems such as music, animation, avatar, written texts, and graphics. His mini-homepage played contemporary Christian music in Korean as a background, and indicated his Christian identity. He also decorated his avatar,

called “Mini-me” living in “Mini-room” with some costumes purchased from *Cyworld* online market. He dressed his avatar in basic items and added an animation of arising hearts from the avatar in an effort to convey that the Mini-room is a lovely space, close to his heart. In order to construct a stronger sense of self (Choi, 2006), Jason would decorate the Mini-room with diverse household furniture and dress his avatar with neat costumes.

But after moving to the city, he did not invest cyber money for the Mini-room and the avatar. He left a message for his friends in Korea in the left column beneath his profile picture saying, “[translated] Even though I don’t visit here daily, I didn’t completely stop *Cyworld*.”

Figure 6.4. Jason’s *Cyworld* Mini-Homepage

Pieces of Flair. "Pieces of Flair" was a multimodal representation found in Emily's and Chloe's *Facebook*. It allowed them to describe themselves with buttons called flairs. Figure 6.5, for example, shows how Chloe represented herself with 28 flairs regarding aspects of her identities including her Christian identity, Korean identity, gender identity, and her interests in popular culture. In order to complete it, she brought in flairs from a pre-existing *Facebook* directory, and used some flairs she had received from her friends. She made others with her own images since *Facebook* provided an easy tool to make the flairs. She often sent her self-made flairs to her friends as gifts.

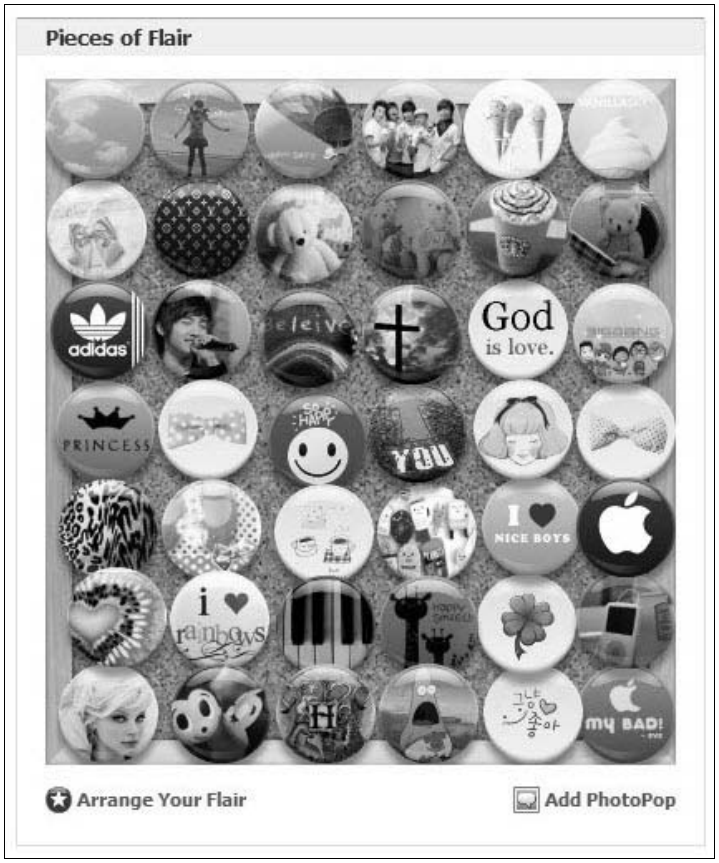

Figure 6.5. Chloe's Pieces of Flair

Posting photos. Posting photos on social network sites can be considered as a non-verbal description of self as a social actor. With the exception of Andrew who removed the 'Photo' tab from his Facebook profile, the other three participants posted hundreds of pictures on their social network sites. Over 80% of the photos posted on their social network sites were taken with their friends. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) explain this as an effective non-verbal way to show their social ties:

> It is as if the user is saying, 'Watch me and know me by my friends.' By 'showing without telling,' *Facebook* users sought to make certain implicit identity claims aimed at generating desired impressions on their viewers especially in terms of the depth and extent of their social ties. (p. 1825)

Jason's sudden posting of photos on *Cyworld* for the first time in a long time was a good example of what Zhao and his colleagues say in the excerpt. By posting several photos such as the one shown in including Figure 6.6, which shows him with three white female school friends on a camping trip, he intended to show to his Korean friends his successful social ties in the U.S. Through his pose and his caption stating that the camping trip was improvisatory and occurred without their parents' approval, he intended to convey his social status as a desirable male who is popular among a group of white, American females.

Figure 6.6. Jason's Photo Posted on *Cyworld*

Tagging

One function of the Internet literacy practices youth engaged was to keep their existing social relationships in the Internet spaces they affiliated. As mentioned in Chapter Five, adolescents' attachment to friends can be considered a natural developmental phenomenon (Stern, 2008). With the exception of Andrew, the participants invested considerable time and effort maintaining friendships, especially on *Facebook*. The wall-to-wall function of *Facebook* was also a possible way of connecting with others, as shown in the case of Emily (Figure 4.7) and her second-generation Korean female friend. However, the other participants hesitated to utilize the wall-to-wall function because the communication was visible to other *Facebook* acquaintances.

In addition to general ways of communicating such as chatting or email, tagging was a unique way of connecting with peers on *Facebook*. Tagging was a *Facebook* function allowing participants to refer to a friend on *Facebook* whenever they posted a picture or a video clip. It mostly occurred when the friend appeared in the product. But sometimes the tagging occurred even when the friend did not appear in the product. This happened in cases where the tagger wanted the tagged to pay attention to the product because it would end up on both of their walls.

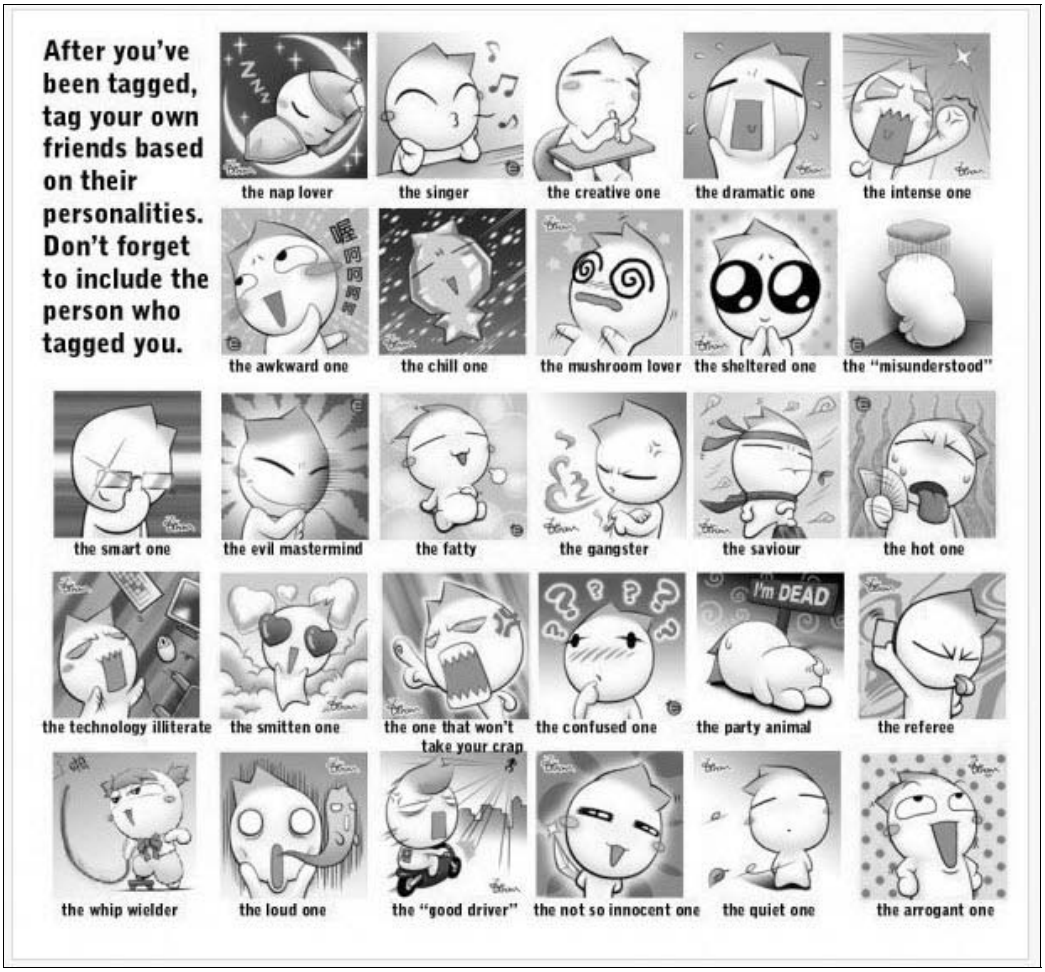

Figure 6.7. Emily's Tagging of Her Friends

Figure 6.7 shows another way of tagging on *Facebook* through an application. Emily tagged her friends by matching them with each of the picture and a short personality description. In this application Emily described herself as "The dramatic one." She staged other friends as "The nap lover," "The creative one," "The referee," and so on. The friends who were tagged visited her *Facebook* page later and made comments on her description about themselves.

Choice of Websites, Contents, and Language

As mentioned in Chapter Five, pursuit of agency is an innate in human nature and it is reflected in identity construction. A person always tries to describe himself as a competent agent in a given context in various ways. Among others, choice is a central way to practice one's agency (Johnston, 2004). This section explores how the four participants extended their agency through diverse choices in their Internet environments.

Choice of favorite websites. Although technically the world becomes wired in a fast speed, human interaction through the Internet still remains localized. For example, *Gmail* has become very popular in an American context, but when I enter my personal information in Korean websites, I have to type in "gmail.com" manually in most cases because "gmail.com" does not exist in a drop-down menu of more than 20 choices. Likewise, *Baidu* (a representative Chinese search engine) or *Cyworld* is largely unknown in American contexts.

The choice of favorite web sites and the frequency of one's access to the sites is a noticeable way to represent one's identity with agency. Chloe's frequent visits to Korean websites such as *Daum* and *Naver* (major Korean portal sites) for the news about Korean idol stars, Emily's frequent visit to *Redspottve.net* and *Mysoju.com* for Asian TV dramas, Jason's move to *Facebook* from *Cyworld*, and Andrew's addiction to Answerbag can all be understood as personal agency through the choice of favorite websites on the Internet.

One salient point regarding the choice of favorite websites was Jason's continual visits to *Daum*. His visits appeared to be inconsistent with his efforts toward Americanization at the beginning of data collection, but I later came to understand this as a strategic practice for reading world news in his more fluent language, Korean, so that he could be prepared to chat about current events with his American friends and assert an American identity.

Choice of contents. During a face-to-face interview, I asked Andrew if he utilized some Internet content for the maintenance of his Korean knowledge and language skills. He said there was not much content on the Internet when he was young, but this was not the case for his younger sister:

> [Translated] Even though she is 5 years younger than me and born here, her Korean is much more fluent than me as she had spent a lot of time watching Korean TV shows through *YouTube* or other Korean-related sites since young. So, sometimes my parents say I

could have been a more fluent in Korean if the Internet such as *YouTube* had become popular several years earlier.

This reminded me that different trajectories happen even in the same website such as *YouTube*. In other words, people may use the same website for vastly different purposes that interact with their identity construction. While Chloe spent most of her time accessing Korean-related content on *YouTube*, Jason mostly watched hip-hop or B-boy dancing, which aided his Americanization. One's choice of content on a website is closely related to identity construction.

Choice of language. As the Internet environment came to support multiple languages, one's language preference on the Internet functions as an indicator of identity. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Chloe's choice of Korean language and Jason's effort to use English showed examples of identity construction through the choice of language. Especially Chloe's choice of Korean language on *Facebook* was remarkable. Considering that *Facebook* is an American-based social network site and the majority of her 240 friends on *Facebook* were American school friends, her use of Korean language was a bold statement of Korean identity, and undertaken at the risk of excluding 90% of her *Facebook* audience.

Summary

Through a cross case analysis, this chapter explored how the four participants utilized the affordance of the Internet as a way to practice their agency. Through an inductive categorizing procedure, this chapter sorted their agency practices into four

different categories: Outsourcing, multimodal construction of self, tagging, and choice of websites, content, and language.

Outsourcing referred to a strategic way to bring in the sources of others to design one's own texts. Participating in diverse applications, making links, quoting, and borrowing were found as the sub-categories of outsourcing. Multimodal construction of self was highlighted when the youth designed their own meaning by combining diverse semiotic systems. In almost all cases, these expressions extended beyond the logocentrism valued in schooled literacy practices. Tagging was a unique way to interact with one's acquaintances by assigning the readers of one's own products on *Facebook*. Finally, youth's choice of websites, contents, and language was a central way to practice one's agency, and provided a means to enact multiple identities for a selected audience of peers.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

During this study, I came to know two male and two female Korean American adolescents: Andrew, Jason, Emily, and Chloe. Since stories of Korean American adolescents are hardly told in educational research, this study aimed to provide an analysis of how Korean American adolescents constructed their identity through literacy practices on the Internet. The result showed the complexity and changeability of the four participants' identities on the Internet. Unlike their life in school, where identities are imposed on them through a variety of constraining labels, the online environments they accessed were flexible enough to accommodate their shifting identities, and even provided them tools for authoring and displaying their identity constructions for large audiences of peers. After summarizing the findings from this study, I will discuss the implication of this study for school practice, literacy researchers, and Korean community leaders. Limitations of this study will follow at the end.

Summary of Findings

Findings from each case. Andrew was a 1.5 generation Korean American adolescent who arrived in the U.S. when he was three years old. He experienced a hard time in constructing his identity because he was caught between a Korean and American identity. He toggled between the two, deliberating his uncertain status in both categories. His frequent interaction on Q&A sites helped him reduce his anxiety

and gain confidence by voicing his struggles through the questions he posed and through seeking counsel from anonymous others.

Jason arrived in the U.S. from Korea when he was fifteen. Since he couldn't return to Korea without serving in its military, he remained in the U.S. and constructed an Americanized identity. His identity construction was aided by his move from *Cyworld* (a Korean based social networking site) to *Facebook* and through his interactions with white friends at school and second-generation Korean American adolescents at church.

Emily was a second-generation Korean American adolescent born in the U.S. Because of her family's economic status, she performed many responsibilities for her family and felt a strong allegiance to them. Her Internet literacy practices were closely related to her family, especially to her mother. She also had a strong Asian identity. At school she interacted with Asian students who shared her experience as a minority. They formed groups on the Internet and shared media on these sites that helped them affirm and represent an Asian identity.

Chloe was a 1.5-generation Korean American who arrived in the U.S. at seven years old. She grew up with dual ethnic identities. She had constructed a Korean ethnic identity at home with her family and an American identity at school with her white female friends she had since elementary school. However, since interacting with Korean American adolescents through a private SAT academy, her Korean ethnic identity became more salient than her American identity. In addition,

she constructed a strong Christian identity, which she foregrounded on *Facebook*, indicating that her ethnic identity is a hybrid of American and Korean culture.

Findings from cross case analysis. Several findings emerged from a cross case analysis. First, even though the youth had constructed different ethnic identities based on their sociocultural environments, they each showed that ethnic identity was an important part in their self-descriptions.

Their Internet literacy practices showed that the social network sites they accessed online were segregated even though they were designed to be widely accessible. The networking sites they accessed were situated within the sociocultural contexts where they lived; so, for example, Jason's move from *Cyworld* to *Facebook* indicated his growing affiliation with U.S. peers, and showed evidence of his identity work in constructing a Korean American identity.

I also found that symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1977) existed even within Korean communities, especially in contexts where newcomers were a majority. For example, in Andrew's school and Emily's Korean school, newcomers regarded their imperfect pronunciation of Korean language and unfamiliarity with current Korean as being wrong or inferior. The ensuing tension between the groups produced negative attitudes, and provoked a sense of isolation and occasional violence between newcomers and the 1.5 and second generation Korean youth.

The four participants in this study had constructed multiple identities interacting within their environments. In order to describe the multipleness, I adopted the notion of multifacetedness and fluidity. The notion of multifacetedness, in a

synchronic sense, was used to describe how identities are performed according to one's context. Examples of multifacetedness discussed in this study were: Hybrid Korean American identity, gender identity, Asian identity, family membership, and different roles youth enacted in different situations. The concept of fluidity recognizes these youth's ever-changing identity in a diachronic aspect. Examples of the fluidity of identity found in this study were: Change within one category of identity, salience of one identity over the other from the status of duality, the change of salience hierarchy across categories, and transient identity.

Finally, in spite of diverse social structures surrounding them, the youth acted as agentive meaning-makers in getting their voice heard. The affordance (Kress, 2003) of the Internet environment helped them do this easily and strategically for a large audience of their peers in both America and Korea. Outsourcing, multimodality, tagging, and selectivity were found as examples of affordances provided by social networking sites. Youth used these strategically to design and distribute their identity enactments, and even solicit others response to their social positionings. Rather than being positioned by others passively as many youth are in school, the online social networking sites let youth position themselves in ways they wanted to be seen and understood. In a sense, they used the sites to author themselves on their own terms.

Implication

One of the main goals of educational research is to suggest a better idea to establish a healthier learning community by exploring unrecognized problems in

educational places. I started this study with the hope that one way of establishing a healthier learning community is, as McCarthey and Moje (2002) state, to remove the labels imposed on students in general and especially those foisted upon ethnically marked students:

> We have tended to use labels to characterize students as *shy* or *aggressive*, *motivated* or *lazy*, and this has given us license to dismiss our own roles as educators in promoting school failure. When we consider identities to be social constructions, and thus always open for change and conflict depending on the social interaction we find ourselves in, we open possibilities for rethinking the labels we so easily use to identify students. By considering identity as an important concept that needs to be embraced, challenged, and reconceptualized, we might be able to think about students and their literacy practices in ways that will help us reconsider those labels. (p. 230, italics in the original)

I believe that the removal of the labels can begin with careful consideration of students' changeability and complexity not only as learners, but also as human beings. After all, people are " . . . extremely complex social beings with a multitude of fluctuating, at times conflicting, needs and desires" living in " . . . extremely complex social environments that consist of overwhelmingly asymmetrical power relations and subject the learners to multiple discourses" (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 603). The diversity among the four participants' in this study has become a good

example of how difficult it is to attach the same label to them in spite of their shared ethnicity.

While it is promising that a closer observation of marked adolescents provides a clearer understanding of them, but there still remain some questions: Whose responsibility is to implement a closer observation of them for a clearer understanding? How and where can they be observed more clearly? Who needs a better understanding of them?

Implication for literacy researchers. Responding to the first two questions (Whose responsibility is to implement a closer observation of them for a clearer understanding? How and where can they be observed more clearly?), I think literacy researchers' role, especially researchers who approach their work from a critical perspective, is to become messengers of the adolescents' literacy practices in out-of-school contexts. As shown in this study, it is promblematic to observe their innate voice through literacy practices at school where Whiteness is considered normal and unmarked.

Another reason why literacy researchers' role is important is because, as mentioned in Chapter Five through the voice of Emily, their out-of-school literacy space is not easily open to the adults around them such as classroom teachers and parents. I came to recognize through this study that a successful access to their space required a lot of knowledge about adolescent development, rapport, interview skills, and, in my case, technical knowledge on the Internet.

I think it is necessary to address two methodological issues I encountered while implementing this study for the researchers who may embark upon similar projects. The first issue regarded consent of other youth who interacted with the participants in this study. The interactions between participants and their friends were important in considering their identity construction, but analysis of a participant's symbolic interaction on the sites couldn't be fully described without the consent of others. I had to decide how I treated the contents of the participants' friends' products that were posted on the participants' social network sites. But quoting others' discourse products required a continuing permission procedure. Fortunately I obtained permission from Angela (because her role in this study was important) and her mother, but this issue still remains questionable to me.

Regarding the investigation of identity construction, I found through this study that the degree of identity salience was not always proportional to the quantity of products on the Internet. For example, while Emily and Chloe had a strong family membership, it was rarely shown in their Internet literacy products. They would spend time with their family members on *YouTube* or other websites for accessing Korean-related contents, but this couldn't be observed without face-to-face interview and the Internet Literacy Practice Log (Appendix C). This indicates a study on identity construction may distort the result if it exclusively depends on the products without enough triangulation with other sources.

Implication for school practice. One purpose of this study was to provide classroom teachers with a clearer understanding of Korean American students so that

their situation can be considered more carefully. For example, Andrew's problem was never recognized at school because it was hidden by his academic success as a student. Of the four participants, Andrew expressed the most tension constructing his identity as a Korean American. The data reveal a young man who feels he is an outsider in both cultures, and wonders if his hard work and desire to succeed will be enough to gain the privilege and status he feels Anglo Americans are naturally bestowed in this country. His sense of displacement, alienation, and occasional anger might be impairing his mental health.

I also came to realize that racial and ethnic segregation at school among adolescents was more serious than I imagined. The most important reason was that they didn't have a physical space to interact with each other except in their classrooms. Their *Facebook* was also segregated because most of the social network sites they accessed simply reflected their lives in the real world rather than extend it. A zone of intercultural conversation (Dooly, 2009) needs to be made in their school world. Once the zone is made off-line, their cyber world practices could strengthen it.

A concern among literacy teachers and researchers is whether the Internet literacy practices constitute anything serious enough to care about. While implementing this study, I learned that the schools participants attended blocked social network sites, including *Cyworld*, so they couldn't access them at school. They are still considered unsanctioned literacy practices (Moje, 2000). However, this study showed the sites youth accessed provided a space for creative meaning making.

Their authoring was not random, but thoughtful and strategic. As Williams (2008) states, "The commonly held belief that social networking pages are composed without thought or even anxiety is about as believable as thinking that university students don't pay attention to the choice of which clothes to wear" (p. 34). It is also a space to provide them with "authentic contexts for communication that reflect everyday practices" (Merchant, 2005, p. 312). Most of all, the Internet is a space for them to practice their agency as shown in the cases in Chapter Six. Johnston reminds us: "If nothing else, children should leave school with a sense that if they act, and act strategically, they can accomplish their goals. I call this feeling a sense of agency" (p. 29).

Implication for community leaders and parents. One important purpose of this study was to show Korean community leaders and Korean American adolescents' parents that Korean American adolescents' lives were exposed to uneasy and complex situations both at school and even within Korean communities. One remarkable finding from this study was that the Korean American adolescents rarely interacted with other peoples of color. This resulted mainly from their hierarchal recognition of race, and their perception that they ranked higher than other peoples of color. I observed similar hierarchal recognition from older Korean American generation during my six years of Korean community activities in the U.S. I didn't ask the four participants directly where their hierarchal recognition came from, as it could be understood as a personal attack. However, I could assume their

hierarchal recognition was partially inherited from the culture of their older generation.

Second, this study showed the segregation within Korean American adolescents according to their immigrant status, language, class, and so on in the era of globalization. The Korean community needs to be more sensitive and generous to this change in order to reduce unnecessary conflicts among the members of Korean American community. They need to be more respectful to other Korean Americans' different positionings instead of enforcing one's own understanding of Koreanness.

Limitations

While I tried to maximize the participants to make the findings more transferrable (Patton, 2002; Mertens, 1998), it is accurate to say the results of this study describe the general tendency of Korean American adolescents living in the United States. One's identity construction can't be free from one's situatedness and locality (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Gee, 2000/2001). Andrew's story would have been different if he had lived in a more liberal and multiracial state like New York, or in a city like Los Angeles where he could meet and make more friends with Korean American friends in a similar situation.

Second, I tried to describe my findings in a multimodal way by showing the multimodal texts produced by the participants instead of telling what they looked like with written language. One ironic situation in the area of multimodal literacy

research is that argumentation for the importance of multimodality inevitably has to be published on a paper according to the tradition of "logocentrism" (Wells, 2000). So, the readers of this study can't help imagining how Jason's dances looked like (Figure 4.5.) and how multimodal his mini-homepage (Figure 6.5) was.

Finally, even though I observed participant's Internet literacy practices as thoroughly as possible, there remained some limitation to what I could observe. One way of addressing this limitation is requiring participant's use of a screen-recording program that captures data from all of their online activities. I initially considered this, but finally decided such an approach to data collection would violate participant's privacy and inhibit participation.

APPENDIX A

Informal Interview Questions for the Selection of Participants

1. Are you a Korean American?
2. What is your age and what grade are you in?
3. What school are you attending? Are there some Korean origin students in your school?
4. What elementary and middle school did you attend?
5. Who are your close friends at school or other places?
6. Can you tell me a little about your family history, especially regarding their immigration history?
7. What language do you usually speak at home? How about your family?
8. Are you involved in any Korean-related local community such as Korean church?
9. Do you have your own computer, or is there one in your home connected to the Internet? Can you use the computer at any time?
10. How much time do you spend on the Internet per week except for the purpose of homework?
11. What are your favorite activities on the Internet?
12. Which websites do you visit frequently?
13. Do you have a home page or blog?
14. Are you a member of social network sites such as *Cyworld*, *MySpace*, or *Facebook*?
15. What other Internet communities are you enrolled in as a member? Are you an active member of those communities?
16. Do you think that Internet activity is an important part of your life?
17. How do you access the Internet usually? Do you have your own computer?

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Face-to-Face Meeting

Questions about identity: Multipleness

- What is your favorite avatar, ID, or nickname on the Internet? Do you have several of them? Why?
- What are the most important identities to you now?
- In which community do you represent the most different self from the self of your daily life?
- What kind of contents do you usually post on this site?
- What Korean-related contents do you usually watch/read? And where?

Questions about identity: Locality & Situatedness

- What website do you visit frequently to produce texts?
- What language do you use on this site?
- What kind of contents do you usually watch on this website?
- Do you have specific reasons to define yourself this way in this text?
- Who do you think you are in this text?
- Have you ever presented this kind of identity in other texts?

Questions about identity: Group membership

- What group activities do you participate in through the Internet?
- Who do you usually interact with through this site?
- How do you know this person offline?
- Who usually makes comments on your social network sites?
- Who are they in the photos/videos of your social network site?
- Who do you usually tag on social network sites? Or by whom are you

usually tagged?

- Who do you think are possible readers of this text? Who do you want to read this text? Who do you want not to?

Questions about identity: Role

- What's your role in this group?
- Do you frequently leave comments on this site?
- Do you visit this site frequently?

Questions about the Internet literacy practices

- How much time did you spend last week on the Internet?
- How much time did you spend on this site?
- How did you come to know this website?
- What is your favorite way to produce texts on the Internet?
- When and where do you usually access the Internet?
- Do you frequently take pictures or videos during your daily life for in order to post them on the Internet?
- What chatting program do you usually use?

Questions about multimodal text production for each interview

- Please tell me what you want to express in this text and how each element (pictures, texts, video clips, icons, flash, and so on) of this text works together to convey your meaning.
- Where/how did you learn to produce texts in this way?
- What computer programs did you use to design this text before posting it on the Internet?
- What was difficult about producing this text?

APPENDIX C

Internet Literacy Practice Log

Internet Literacy Practice Log

Name: _____ Week: __/__/__/(Sun) - __/__/__/(Sat)

1. Please work on this log each week.
2. For your privacy, you may exclude some entries.
3. Describe your activities at each website in detail.
4. If you visit several sites at the same time, please write about them in separate entries.

ate	Website	Activity	Memo or Comment

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